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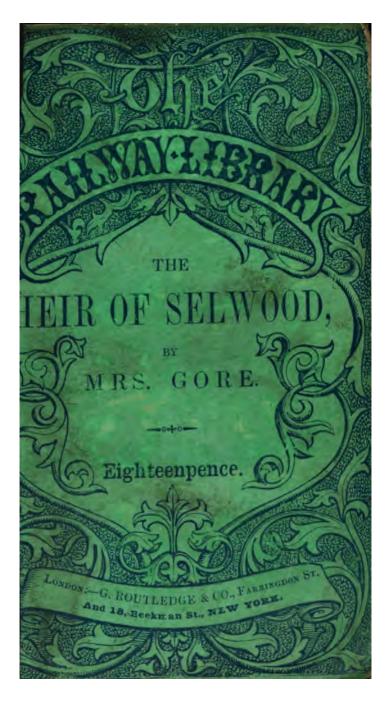
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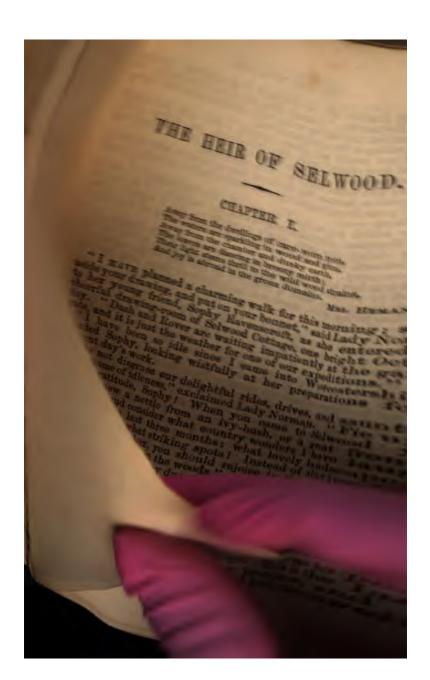
By JOHN HARWOOD,

AUTHOR OF "STANBOUL, THE CITY OF GREE."

AUTHOR OF STARRED OF Gives a better insight into the domestic manners of the Rue sians than any other work published."

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THE

HEIR OF SELWOOD.

BY

MRS. GORE,



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THE HEIR OF SELWOOD.

CHAPTER I.

Away from the dwellings of care-worn men, The waters are sparkling in wood and glen. Away from the chamber and dusky earth, The leaves are dancing in breezy mirth; Their light stems thrill to the wild wood strains, And joy is abroad in the green domains. MRS. HEMANS.

"I HAVE planned a charming walk for this morning; so lay aside your drawing, and put on your bonnet," said Lady Norman to her young friend, Sophy Ravenscroft, as she entered the cheerful drawing-room of Selwood Cottage, one bright October day. "Dash and Rover are waiting impatiently at the garden gate, and it is just the weather for one of our expeditions."

"I have been so idle since I came into Worcestershire,"

pleaded Sophy, looking wistfully at her preparations for a

diligent day's work.

"Do not disgrace our delightful rides, drives, and saunters, by the name of idleness," exclaimed Lady Norman. "Fie upon your ingratitude, Sophy! When you came to Selwood you scarcely knew a nettle from an ivy-bush, or a gnat from a dragon-fly: and consider what country wonders I have taught you during the last three months; what lovely landscapes I have shown you, what striking spots! Instead of slaving here over your drawing-box, you should rejoice in the opportunity of another day's study in the woods."

"I have enjoyed so many days' study," replied Miss Ravens-

"You have still nothing to show for my lost leisure."

"You have not yet seen the effect of Tuesday's frost upon the beech trees. The plantations near the river are tinged with gold. My dear Mrs. Ravenscroft;" continued Lady Norman, interrupting herself as Sophy's mother, a good-humoured middle-aged woman, entered the room, "pray help me to persuade your daughter to her own advantage. This is the last day of my helidays. Sie Richard vetures to recrew and day of my holidays. Sir Richard returns to-morrow, and I want to introduce Sophia to the picturesque old ford at Avonwell, while the weather admits of the excursion."

"My daughter will be delighted to go with you," replied rs. Ravenscroft. "I am so little able to bear her company in Mrs. Ravenscroft. her rambles, that but for your kind assistance, she would have seen nothing of the neighbourhood."

"If you permit me, dear mamma, I shall enjoy the walk beyond everything," said the light-hearted girl, laying aside her occupation. "But you said last night I had neglected my drawing and music since we came to Selwood."

"I said so because Sir Richard Norman's return will deprive you of your friend's society, and throw you back on your usual

avocations -

"To which you wished to reconcile her beforehand!" cried Lady Norman, playfully concluding the sentence. "At least, let us enjoy this last day's expedition; for I admit that Sir Richard is apt to exact a considerable share of my time and company.

Taking her knitting from her work-basket, while Sophia proceeded to prepare for her walk, Mrs. Ravenscroft could not but reflect in silence, that a husband so covetous of the society of his charming wife, need not have loitered three long months

on the Continent on a mere excursion of pleasure.

"It is now the first week in October; and it was exactly Midsummer when Sir Richard left home," observed Lady Norman, as if penetrating the musings of her companion. "We received the letter from General Trevor, introducing you to our acquaintance, the very day he determined on his journey.

"True,-it was exactly at Midsummer."

"Your arrival at that moment seemed an especial blessing. How tedious would the summer have been to me, but for you and Sophy! General Trevor little guessed the favour he was conferring in that introduction. Till you took this cottage," continued Lady Norman, with earnestness, "I never knew the happiness of friendship. Marrying so young, and living constantly at the Manor-House, with bad roads, a thin neighbourhood, and at a distance from my own family, I have never had even an intimate acquaintance. This is the chief cause of Sir Richard's regret at our having no family. People with young children growing up around them, do not feel the want of an interest in life."

Mrs. Ravenscroft shrewdly conjectured that the want of an heir to his fine estate and ancient baronetcy might have a still

greater share in the discontents of Sir Richard.

"But now, all my cares are over," resumed Lady Norman, cheerfully. "You have a lease of the cottage; and we have fourteen happy, sociable, neighbourly years in prospect. How I long to receive Norman's congratulations on the fortunate change your arrival has effected! Thanks to Sophy's instructions, he will find me so improved in singing, and such a proficient in German!"

"My daughter is lucky to find such encouragement in her

favourite pursuits."

"I cannot help wondering," continued Lady Norman, after a few moments' cogitation, "how you will like Sir Richard. Our position is so very strange! That two dear friends of mine should neither know my husband, nor be known to him!— From the moment of his departure, dear Mrs. Ravenscroft, we have been passing many hours of every day in each other's society. I have never ceased talking to you of him, or writing to him of you. Yet you are about to meet as strangers. I shall only guess your opinion of him. His of you and Sophy, I know him well enough to anticipate. What a pleasant winter we shall pass together."

"Admit, at least," said Mrs. Ravenscroft, raising her eyes a moment from her knitting to the sweet face of her companion "that you have done your best to make us familiar with Sir Richard Norman's good qualities!"

"You will soon acknowledge that I have not praised him too highly," replied Matilda, blushing. "Yet I have more than common cause to be partial. I owe my husband gratitude as well as love, for his choice of one so inferior to himself in birth,

station, talents, and education."

"I cannot admit a man's mere preference to be a subject of thankfulness," observed Mrs. Ravenscroft; a stickler, at all times, for the dignity of the sex. "The feeling is spontaneous, and pursued for selfish gratification. It is only by the uniform kindness of after-life that a man establishes a claim on the gratitude of a wife."

"Then I have still a right to plead gratitude towards Sir Richard Norman," replied Matilda. "But here comes Sophia. I do not apologize for taking her away. I see you have ample amusements in store for our absence. Your marker has not advanced beyond the middle of Kirkpatrick's 'Nepaul.'" And the thickness of Miss Ravenscroft's shoes and shawl having been carefully passed in review by her mother, away they went

on their expedition to Avonwell.

Mrs. Ravenscroft had cause to be careful. Sophy was the only child of one of the happiest of happy marriages; commenced in cheerful poverty, prospered by courage and intelligence, and terminated by the glorious death of Captain Ravenscroft in the service of his country; bequeathing a sailor's fame and more than a sailor's ordinary gains, to his widow and child.

Mrs. Ravenscroft possessed gratifying retrospections to solace her misfortune. Not an angry feeling or harsh word had disturbed their union. She had roughed it with her husband through all sorts of climates and vicissitudes; and, though neither literary nor learned, had considerable insight into human character. It was a consolation to her to find in her

daughter a lively and intelligent companion, indifferent to the pomps of life; and having wound up the settlement of their little fortune, Mrs. Ravenscroft retired to an agreeable habitation in Worcestershire, selected by her relation, Lady Farleigh, and considered herself fortunate that accident had secured them neighbours so desirable as Sir Richard and Lady Norman.

Beyond the Manor-House, Selwood had little to boast in the way of neighbourhood. Farleigh Castle was eight miles distant; and the vicar and his wife were valetudinarians of advanced age. But scarcely were they settled at the cottage, when both mother and daughter admitted that every deficiency was compensated by the cordiality with which they were welcomed into the country by the amiable Lady Norman.

The accidental absence of Sir Richard served to further the

The accidental absence of Sir Richard served to further the progress of their intimacy. Sympathy of sex, tastes, and pursuits, brought them readily together; and long before the period appointed for his return from France, it seemed almost forgotten among them that they had ever lived apart. For Mrs. Ravenscroft, Lady Norman felt the respect of a daughter; for Sophia, the tenderness of a sister. The simple history of their lives had often received the tribute of her tears; and her own, less eventful and less touching, was frankly disclosed in return. Matilda related it without apology or comment. But Mrs. Ravenscroft's experience of the world suggested from her simple text a thousand conjectures concerning the present prospects of her young friend, and the character and peouliarities of Sir Richard Norman.

CHAPTER II.

There, or within the compass of her fields, At any moment may the dame be found; True as the stockdove to her shallow nest; And to the grove that holds it.

Wordsworth.

THERE was something baronial and commanding in the aspect of Selwood Manor-House. Situated on the summit of a lofty hill and surrounded by sloping woods, it afforded a landmark for all the country round. The mansion was of Elizabethan date and architecture; but closely adjoining, stood the remains of an ancient keep and embankment, retaining the dignified title of Norman Castle, and connected with the high

origin of the family.

Previous to the establishment of roads and inland navigation, our ancestors must surely have possessed some preternatural facility for the transportation of stone for architectural purposes. We are teld in sacred story by what means the rafters of cedar were removed from Mount Carmel for the construction of Solomon's Temple; and it was pretty apparent that the grey granite forming the walls of the Manor-House, was supplied by the ruins of the ancient fabric. But by what process the stones of Norman Castle had been originally conveyed to the site, was still a mystery. In spite of the means and appliances of modern mechanism, the miraele has never been renewed; and the frightful red-brick houses of that part of Worcestershire, are put still deeper to the blush by the sober hue of the noble façade of Sir Richard Norman's family mansion.

Secured by this solidity of construction from the injuries inflicted on other manorial houses by the vagaries of modern improvement, the Manor-House had suffered nothing from the innovations introduced under the auspices of the houses of Hanover and Nassau. The windows retained their noble proportions, the doors their original entablatures; and the furniture was characteristic and appropriate. Old pictures, old arras, old carvings, old porcelain; all was quaint and antiquated. With the exception of a suite of rooms fitted up for Lady Norman on her marriage, everything remained as in the days of the first George; when the alliance of Sir Rupert Norman with a city heiress, produced the partial removation of the

Manor.

The house was of liberal, but not stupendous dimensions; fortunately enough—since, even without any vast intricacy of

corridors or staircases, it was gloomy and dispiriting. The disproportion of the old-fashioned panes of glass to the windows, the fretted cornices and groined ceilings, the dingy hue of the satin hangings and mahogany doors, produced an unpleasant effect upon eyes accustomed to contemplate the airy but meretricious elegance of modern taste; nor was it possible to pass a winter week under Sir Richard's roof without admiring the hardiness of his predecessors, ere the arts of lighting

and heating attained their present pitch of perfection.

Considerable respect was impressed, at the same time, upon the guests at Selwood Manor towards a family which furnished such noble portraits to the picture gallery, and such majestic monuments to the parish church. For a century and a half, however, the last had suffered interruption; the latest Norman interred at Selwood being a cavalier of the reign of Charles II.: since which epoch, the members of the house had suffered grievous dispersion. Some were lying at St. Germains, some in Austria, some in Italy. Many had seen the light on foreign ground, and were to foreign dust returned. Even the present inheritor, Sir Richard, was receiving his education at the college of Scotch Benedictines in Paris, when the outbreak of the first French revolution sent him back to complete his

studies in his native country.
In all this, and in everything relating to the Manor, there was a certain character of the stately and aristocratic, which lingers with peculiar odour of sanctity among the Roman Catholic gentry of England. The idea of a mesalliance on the part of the head of such a house, seemed almost preposterous. Yet such was the fact. Lady Norman was the daughter of a Warwickshire manufacturer; and, what was held more heinous by the hereditary servants of Sir Richard, a heretic-the granddaughter of a Protestant minister of the gospel. They were almost resigned to the affliction that the marriage-bed of the degenerate Baronet had proved childless, lest the daughter of perdition should bequeath a touch of heresy to the future

representatives of his line.

From any religious scruples on the subject, however, Sir Richard Norman was free. From the period when, at fifteen years old, he was driven home from Paris, till now, when the recent restoration of peace to Europe enabled him to visit it again, the stanchness of his adherence to the church of his fathers had been gradually weakened. But Catholicism was at that period an injured and suffering cause; and a sentiment of chivalry attached many of its least credulous sons to the drooping banner. The dissipations of London society, however, had done their part to diminish the respect of the gay young baronet for the abstruse doctrines so long and tediously inculcated by his preceptor, the Abbé O'Donnel; and Sir Richard sometimes found it difficult to warm himself into becoming championship, when the cause, as a political question, was discussed in his hearing at the fashionable dinner-tables, with the arguments of the leading periodicals of that day of intole-

Apprehensive of alienating the affections of his pupil from a cause so much in need of the support of wealth and consequence, the Abbé had been an indulgent task-master. lessons went no further than the surface. He required from young Norman only the renunciation of faults and frailties revolting to the moral order of society. Egotism, the master vice of the heart, the besetting sin of the great and prosperous, he suffered to flourish unchecked; and Sir Richard grew up accordingly the slave of impulse, and the creature of selfishness

and pride.

Handsome and intelligent, there was little opening for the display of his talents; and the career of public life being closed against the young papist, his misdirected energies were suffered to run to waste. It was a dissolute era of the dissolute London world. The excitement produced by the extraordinary political events agitating the Continent, seemed productive of universal disorder. Every day brought tidings from afar of struggle and death; and, as if ashamed of their inaction, the idlers of London plunged daily into deeper intemperance. Among the wild and reckless, Sir Richard shone pre-eminent. It was only by a certain hauteur of manner enhancing his beauty of person, that he was distinguished from the fashionable ruffians of the day.

Once emancipated from the control of guardians and tutors, no counsels were interposed between him and ruin. An orphan in childhood, he was the sole survivor of his family. Of the once flourishing house of Norman, there remained only a second cousin, on whom the baronetcy and estates were entailed; who, whether as his former guardian or future heir, was an object of intense dislike to Sir Richard.

In that quarter, the ancient family seemed secure from Mr. Norman was the father of a numerous offspring, all rigid Catholics, and like himself engaged in mer-cantile pursuits. Giles, the eldest son, was a partner in his father's bank; Rupert, the second, the head of a house of business in Trieste; a third was settled in New York; and two younger ones, destined to the same thriving career, were studying at Stonyhurst. Old Norman, who had amassed a considerable fortune in commercial life, was fond of sneering at those unprofitable members of his church who, excluded by the injustice of the country from professional distinctions, were too proud to conquer an independence by humbler means. The banker was a hard, unpolished man, ill-calculated to conciliate the regard or submission of his young relative. With the faults or follies of his ward he had never condescended to argue. His only form of control was irony; of all coercions

the most hardening to the mind of youth. In Sir Richard's boyhood, he had been sneered at for aping the vices of a men; in his manhood, for aping the follies of a fine gentleman. Mr. Norman openly predicted that his ward would never come to good; a prediction, how often the cause of its own accomplishment!

Vainly did Mrs. Norman, a being of somewhat gentler mood, represent that it might be injurious to their children to provoke

the resentment of the head of the family.

"What signifies the lad's enmity to me?" was her husband's reply. "His liking or disliking will neither cut off the entail, nor divert the line of succession. Should he die childless, I must succeed him; and should he leave children of his own, his warmest affection could not alienate a guinea from his rent-

roll, in favour of his relations."

Influenced by this matter-of-fact view of their connexion, Mr. Norman persisted in refusing every concession required by his young relative. During the minority, he took care that the Selwood estates should be properly administered; and, on resigning his trust, troubled his head about them no more. He had more to gain by attending to the ventures of his own argosies and the fluctuation of public securities, than by speculating on the inheritance of Sir Richard Norman; and, once or twice, when (the embarrassments of the young man requiring the co-operation of the heir-at-law) the men of business of the baronet applied to the men of business of the man of business to negotiate between them, Mr. Norman's replies were almost insulting.

Such was the state of affairs between the cousins, till Sir Richard attained his seven-and-twentieth year; when Mr. Norman was one day suddenly reminded by his wife, that their kinsman was still in difficulties, and still a bachelor. The remark, probably, bore indirect reference to the introduction that season into society of their only daughter, Agatha; for upon Mr. Norman's indulging in his usual exclamations against Sir Richard, his lady answered with great naiveté—"Extravagant and dissipated I admit him to be; but that

might render a fortune of fifteen thousand pounds the more acceptable. Marry he certainly will; and if our son Giles is to be cut out, better by a grandchild of our own than by the

son of a stranger."

Startled by this luminous view of the case, Mr. Norman indulged in no further interjections. The project was more segacious than he had expected to hear unfolded by his wife. He liked the thoughts of insuring his chance of the Selwood property, of underwriting his spec. The match would be an excellent one for his daughter; and in so business-like a point of view did the affair present itself, that he wrote that very day to Sir Richard, stating the amount of his daughter's for-

tune, proposing the marriage, and inviting him to form a more intimate acquaintance with the family.

But young Norman was a very different being from the raw impetuous boy, whom his harsh guardian had formerly sneered

into shame, or controlled by a scrape of the pen.
"Marry the fellow's daughter?" was his indignant exclamation, on receiving these cool proposals from the man he most disliked on earth. "I would as soon bestow my hand upon a barmaid!"

The terms of his letter of rejection were not many degrees more courteous; and Mr. Norman's commentary on the text, that "he deserved the rebuke, for having been willing to accept a broken-down spendthrift for his son-in-law," confirmed their mutual ill-will, and established a lasting feud in

the family.

It happened that, a few days after his cousin's taunt was repeated to him (with due exaggeration on the part of the good-natured friend employed as spite-bearer between the belligerents), Sir Richard set off from the Manor into Warwickshire, to join a fashionable party at Arden Park for the county races. Still labouring under the excitement of mind produced by his family quarrel, he was ready to listen to any foolish suggestion of his own, or other people's. The repeater of grievances, by whom his wounded pride had been inflamed, had already whispered, when inveighing against the arrogance and interestedness of the heir-at-law,—"Marry, my dear fellow, and disappoint the expectations of the family!"-and Sir Richard Norman was quite in the humour to adopt these sapient counsels.

In his immediate circle were divers lovely ladyships and honourable misses, ready and willing to second his intentions. But Sir Richard was too well versed in the arcana of fashionable corruption, to risk his honour at such fearful odds. The houses of parliament, from which he stood excluded, had been devoting their attention that session to half a dozen divorcebills; and with all his desire to hurl defiance at his offending

heir-at-law, Sir Richard demurred.

Anxious, irritated, flushed with unnatural vivacity, he accompanied Lord Arden's party to the races, and concluded the day at a brilliant ball, given in the Town Hall; and there, while surveying the oddities and uglinesses usually abounding in such heterogeneous assemblies, his attention was arrested by a fair form and prepossessing countenance, which seemed to belong to a higher sphere of society. Captivated by these attractions, he obtained an introduction to Matilda Maule, whose modesty of deportment and elegance of manners completed the charm. The delicacy of extreme youth bloomed on her cheek, enhanced by a profusion of fair glossy ringlets. In the course of an evening's acquaintance, Sir Richard fell desperately in love; and Mr. Norman's chance of inheritance

was thenceforward scarce worth noting.

A country town during race time, is an ark where inferior and superior animals are jumbled together in undistinguishable confusion. The following day the waters subside; and the assemblage disperses itself anew over the face of the land. While Lord Arden's party, including Sir Richard Norman, returned to Arden Park, Mrs. Wickset's party, including Miss Matilda Maule, was about to return to a stuccoed villa, within a few miles of Birmingham. For, alas! the young lovers belonged to orbits far as the poles asunder; Sir Richard being head of a house of eight hundred years' gentility; and Matilda's father, Mr. Maule, the head of a house of business in the hardware line, extensively known as the firm of Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset, and Co.

The discovery of the young beauty's want of connection might, at any other moment, have nipped in the but the passion of her new suitor. But to the influence of Matilda's attractions was added that of his desire to thwart the expectations of his cousin; and the moment he could release himself from the Ardens, he hastened to avail himself of an invitation from Mrs. Wickset to visit her at Acacia-place; and for three weeks following, was scarcely a day absent from Matilda's

society.

Weary of the emptiness and egotism of fashionable life, the gentleness and simplicity of Matilda's character completed the conquest her beauty had begun. To attach the idea of vulgarity to such a being, would have been as absurd as to inquire the pedigree of the Venus de Medicis. She was a thing apart; a creature too richly gifted by nature to be weighed in any ordinary balance. And when at length he hazarded his proposals, the wealthy baronet was inspired by the only sentiment which ought to influence a lover's heart at such a moment, i. e. that it was the height of presumption on his part to aspire to the affections of a person so infinitely superior.

Matilda's answer was favourable. She referred him to her father; and Mrs. Wickset being shrewd enough to guess that Sir Richard Norman's attachment was likely to be put to severe tests by a visit to the factory, and a first introduction to the two resident partners, Messrs. Maule and Cruttenden, resolved that Matilda should return home in time to shed a conciliating grace over the preliminary interview between the baronet and his

future father-in-law.

Though it was one of those cases of love at first sight, which seem to justify the most disproportionate alliances, she felt that it would be injudicious to fortify, by personal disgusts, the opposition which the wayward choice of Sir Richard Norman was likely to excite among his kinsfolk and acquaintance.

CHAPTER III.

What is that curt'sy worth,—or those dove's eyes Which can make gods forsworn!—I melt, and am not Of stronger earth than others!

SHAESPEARE.

THOUGH Sir Richard Norman's wild adventures had often beguiled him so far beyond the narrow pale of fashionable society, that he was apt to fancy the world known to him in all its aspects, high and low, rich and poor, tatters and brocade, a new page in the volume of life was unfolded to him at the factory. To have traced his beloved Matilda to a cottage, and raised her from the picturesque rusticity of hawthorns and a thatched roof, to the splendours of Selwood Manor, would have been an act of poetical justice. But, alas! the scoty establishment of Messrs. Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset, and Co. proved an anti-climax to every high-wrought aspiration of his soul.

Situated at the extremity of a dirty suburb, the huge illpainted gates stood so near a tanner's yard that the fury excited among Mr. Maule's squadron of mastiffs by the sudden stopping of Sir Richard's curricle, called forth the sympathetic rage of the tanner's yelping regiment of curs. And when the stranger pushed his way along an avenue formed by two lofty, dingy walls, and discovered, at the extremity, a gloomy-looking brick house, facing an extensive range of buildings which in aspect resembled a penitentiary, and in smell, the London gas-works,

his disgust was complete.

A squalid-looking individual, arrayed in paper cap, fustian drawers, and a dirty, ragged shirt, whom he beckoned from a pump, undertook to acquaint Mr. Maule that a gentleman wished to speak with him; and Sir Richard paced impatiently up and down beside a range of coalsheds, sickened by the smell of engine-grease, and stifled with the smother of the furnaces, till he was accosted by a square, sober-looking, brown-gaitered gentleman, whose loose and somewhat seedy coat seemed made to embrace the whole firm of Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset, and Co.; and who touched his broad-brimmed beaver respectfully to a stranger having so much the air of a customer well to do in the world.

After proceeding so far in explanation as was admissible in the open yard, Mr. Maule led the way into his dwelling-house; where Sir Richard was informed that, instead of approaching it through the respectable iron gates and sweep forming the regu-

lar entrance, he had crept in the back-way, where there was "no admittance except on business." Still, the atmosphere was the same. Everything on the premises, from the windownor was it till, having followed his sober guide into a neat, airy drawing-room, he found himself surrounded by a choice collection of books, drawings, and musical instruments, he could bring himself to believe that such was the terrestrial paradise of the angelio being by whom his soul had been "lapped in Elysium" at Angela-place blinds to the hollyhocks in the garden, was blackened with soot;

lapped in Elysium" at Acacia-place.

Neither Matilda nor her letter of explanation having at present reached her father, Sir Richard Norman had his own tale to relate; a tale so passing strange, that Mr. Maule was obliged to have it thrice repeated before he could arrive within many degrees of comprehension. To learn that the gentleman before him was a baronet of high descent, with a rent-roll of eight thousand a-year, come to ask for the hand of his daughter. and offer her a jointure of three thousand per annum in return, was a thing to have been scouted as an idle hoax, had Maule been of a jocular nature, or versed in the fooleries of London

But the manufacturer was a grave, stern man; soured by the loss of a wife who had brought him six children to provide for. and taken herself to a better world when it behoved her to stay and take care of them in this; and absorbed by the important interests of a factory employing eight hundred workmen, and a capital of fearful amount. Cruttenden, Wickset, and Co. gave their names and money to the firm; Maule his whole time and The grimy atmosphere was as natal air to him; and the clattering of wheels and stamping of beams, the natural music of his sphere. He had become almost a part of the machinery. The business of his workdays was to amass as liberal a provision for each of his six children as had been bequeathed by his parents to himself; and the relaxation of his Sabbath, to secure, by a threefold attendance at Divine worship, a blessing on the sixfold gains he made it his duty to heap together.

To such a money-mill of a man, it was almost a disappointment that his future son-in-law made no inquiries into the amount of fortune it would be convenient to him to bestow upon his daughter; in addition to the five thousand pounds to which he fancied all the world must know Matilda to be entitled by virtue of her mother's settlement. He had searcely patience when the notification of his intended liberalities produced no change in the handsome countenance of Sir Richard. He began to suspect that all was not quite right with the mysterious stranger; and begged time to talk the matter over with his friends. "Matty was expected home every hour. On the following morning he would have the honour of waiting upon Sir Richard at the 'King's Arms.'"

Though from the moment of setting foot in the factory-yard, poor Norman had been shiefly anxious to bring his visit to a close, he was not altogether satisfied with this summary dismissal. He had anticipated a more cordial reception. He felt that, like a good bill, he had a right to be accepted at sight. Nettled by the coolness of Maule, and disgusted by the fumes of his domicile, he could have found it in his heart to order post-horses and return to the pure altitudes of Selwood Manor. For he had now been some hours absent from the influence of Matilda's charms; and was beginning to discover that in love,

as in all beside, "every medal has its reverse."

On the morrow, however, instead of waiting for the visit announced by Mr. Maule, he was at the factory by ten; a note from Matilds, announcing her return, having invited him to join them at breakfast. Under the presidency of the lovely girl whose natural elegance imparted all the refinement previously wanting to the little household, the establishment assumed a different aspect in his eyes. Old Maule, too, had become cordial and courteous. He was now prepared to shake him by the hand, to give him his daughter, to add ten thousand pounds to her fortune; to devote her original five, nay, to pay off the baronet's incumbrances, in consideration of the handsome jointure secured on the estate to the future Lady Norman. Mr. Maule's present amenity of deportment was no less remarkable than his churlishness at their first interview.

This sudden change was naturally attributed by Sir Richard to Matilda's representations in his favour, and the influence of his personal merit. So ready are we to convert the commonest incidents of life into tributes to our egotism and self-esteem. Mr. Maule's change of demeanour was, in fact, solely produced

by the coarse raillery of one of his partners.

Of the firm of Maule and Co. Thomas Cruttenden alone was a bachelor;—a man of a certain time of life; without connection, without education, raised to opulence by his own exertions, dry, whimsical, and disagreeable. Deficient in the ordinary topics of discourse, Tom Cruttenden delighted in adding weight to his conversation by saying the most unpleasant things, and enforcing their poignancy by a knowing wink. He liked Maule and his family better than any other human beings; was godfather to the second son, and a steady friend to them all. But in becoming an immate under the roof of his widowed partner, he seemed chiefly anxious to comment on the irregularities of the establishment, and the faults of the children. Over young Cruttenden Maule, his godson, he exercised something of parental authority. But as to Matilda, for many years past, he had been descanting daily on the absurdity of the accomplishments bestowed upon her, and the probability that she would live to become a burthen upon the family.

"What man in his senses will marry the girl?" was his nightly

ejaculation to his partner, as a seasoning to the tumbler of Madeira negus with which they concluded together the evenings of their busy days,—"What earthly thing can Matty do, to make herself useful?"

"She makes me happy, and that is all I require of her,"

replied the old gentleman.

She makes you happy because you see her with the preiudiced eyes of a father. But what will a reasonable being of a husband say when he finds her tanging away at her harpstrings when she ought to be minding her family? But she's never likely to have a husband, reasonable or unreasonable. Take my word for it, Matty Maule's name is too much up in this town, as a poor, helpless, make-believe fine lady, for any of our young men to think of her. Matty's marked for an old maid!"

By dint of having this denunciation dinned in his ears, Maule had at length begun to think less favourably of his daughter's attractions. The wife of his junior partner, Mr. Wickset, a kind, motherly woman, by whose advice his daughter's education had been completed by a competent governess, consoled him with assurances that, at every fresh visit of Miss Maule to her sociable house and neighbourhood, new admirers presented themselves. Old Cruttenden was always ready to exclaim, on the return of the young beauty,—"What! back again from the fair, Matty, with the white handkerchief still round your neck? Can't Madam Wickset, with all her caperings and vapourings, manage to get you out of the market? Never mind, lass! Come down a peg or two next fair-day, and no doubt you'll fetch something handsome yet.

It was to this comfortable friend that Maule had repaired for sympathy, after his first interview with Sir Richard Norman. "A baronet with eight thousand a year!" cried Cruttenden, with one of his dry chuckles, after receiving the exulting communication of his partner. "You don't mean to swallow such a hook at your time of life? Baronets with eight thousand per annum

don't grow on every bush. I warrant we shall see the fellow advertised next week in the 'Hue and Cry.'" retorted Maule, with indignation.

"Sir Richard Norman's manners are those of a high-bred, accomplished gentleman."

"The deuce they are! Why, what do you know, pray, of the manners of high-bred, accomplished gentlemen? Look in the police reports," cried Cruttenden, with one of his most knowing winks, "and you will find that all these travelling swindlers have what you call the manners of high-bred, accomplished gentlemen; that is, they sport a gilt guard-chain and copper eye.glass!"

"Sir Richard wears neither the one nor the other," replied

Maule, commanding his temper.

"More fool Sir Richard! Dare say he was Sir Lionel last week, at Leamington or Buxton, and, may be, Sir Albert Fitz-Something or other, at Cheltenham, last year. Send a description of his person to the Clerk of the Peace, and I warrant you'll hear news of Miss Matty's precious fine-gentleman-sweetheart at the Town Hall!"

"I need not go so far," replied Maule, scarcely able to subdue his irritation. "He brought me a letter from Mrs. Wickset, to

whom he had the most satisfactory introductions."

"Why this is better than all the rest! Now just inform me what Jacob Wickset's good woman should know about Wurstershire baronets? She was never thirty miles from Brummagem in her born days. Madam Wickset would be taken in by Jowler the house-dog, dressed up as a dandy, provided he bowed low enough, and took care not to show his tail. No, no, Maule! Take my advice. I know something of the world. I'm wider awake than you are. When this humbugging chap sneaks in to-morrow morning, lock up your silver spoons, and ask him for a reference. If that don't bring him to his marrow-bones, rely upon it the hardened wretch is returned from transportation."

"There are not the slightest grounds for suspecting him to be

other than he pretends; and---'

"Of course not!" interrupted Cruttenden, with another provoking laugh. "You see, Maule, you've brought up that girl of yours with the notion of her making a match, and choose to take for a swan the first goose that hisses an offer. But Tom Cruttenden's not to be bamboozled with borrowed plumes. Tom Cruttenden's had his breeding in a school where fine words butter no parsnips. Tom Cruttenden don't care a cheeseparing for the out and colour of a coat, provided there's something heavy in the pockets. And I'll be bound that the weightiest thing in this Sir Thingumee Norman's, is a bunch of skeleton keys. At all events, don't let him into the counting-house. I wouldn't trust such a fellow with change for half-a-crown."

These pleasantries were wormwood to old Maule, for he possessed no means of disproof. The coarse bantering of his partner was at all times a drawback on his comfort. Yet he had not courage to resent it. Habit rendered the company of the man with whom he had so many interests in common a portion of his existence; and though Cruttenden was always abusing the children, calling the boys dunces, and the girls dawdles, Maule was aware that he would cut off his right arm to do them service, and that they were likely to succeed to a large portion of the old bachelor's fortune. Still, though unwilling to come to a quarrel, it was insupportable to be browbeaten out of all his opinions and

inclinations.

Such was the state of affairs when Matilda arrived in triumph to secure her father's sanction to her happy prospects, and prove him in the right. Tom Cruttenden stood defeated. Tom Cruttenden was forced to admit that the Sir Richard Norman who had been requested by the lord-lieutenant of the county to open the ball with his daughter could be no impostor; and, for the first time in their lives, the senior partner enjoyed a hearty crow over his junior. He would have crowed louder, perhaps, but for the princely marriage-gift bestowed by the eccentric Tom upon "Miss Matty," affording sterling proof of his regard for a family with whose foibles he made so free.

To detail the petty mortifications which rendered Sir Richard's courtain a period of penance, would be a bootless task. Though shortened beyond his hopes by the frank dealing and despatch-of-business celerity of Mr. Maule, there was leisure for a thousand hiting jests from Tom Cruttenden—a thousand trivial irritations

from the whole family.

"Every man to his taste!" was Tom's exclamation, on learning the difference of religion between the young people. "I

wouldn't give my daughter to a Papist!"

"Sir Richard is no bigot," argued the father. "He will allow Matilda the full exercise of her opinions; and though their sons must be reared as Roman Catholics, the daughters will follow the same church as their mother."

"About their sons or daughters I care not a jot," cried Cruttenden, "seeing that they never may have any. But when that poor lass finds herself surrounded with a set of canting priests and bigoted kinsfolk, and sees her husband telling his beads all day long, and worshipping graven images—"

"Sir Richard is by no means a rigid Catholic," interrupted

Maule.

"So much the worse. Since he is a Papist, better be a good 'un. If a man isn't stanch in his religion, in what is he likely

to be in earnest?"

A scruple thus raised in the conscience of old Maule, his stipulations with his son-in-law concerning freedom of worship for Matilda and Matilda's daughters, became almost offensive. Sir Richard found his religious opinions as abhorrently regarded at the factory as those of a Mahomedan. Even Matilda was rendered uneasy by the officious hints and denunciations of her father's friend.

He had scarcely patience with their narrow fanaticism. He had borne with their uncoutness, their want of civilization, their purse-pride, their egotism. But he could not stand being talked at as a Jesuit on the watch to burn the whole bench of bishops at the stake, and requiring the strictest vigilance of the

legislature of the country.

It was some palliation, meanwhile, of Tom Cruttenden's offence, that his sneers at the growing ostentation of the family determined old Maule to solemnize his daughter's wedding in modest privacy. In spite of Mrs. Wickset's indignation, and the

outcries of the little Maules, not a creature was invited. Sir Richard's venerable preceptor, the Abbé O'Donnel, officiated with deeply-wounded feelings in the Roman Catholic service that united his pupil to a Protestant; while Cruttenden's contempt for drawing-room altars and special licenses caused the Protestant ceremony to be solemnized in the parish church,

from whence the happy pair set off for Selwood Manor.

Even on the eve of the great event, with the settlements signed, the family diamonds accepted, and Matilda's wedding-clothes packed in the imperials of the new travelling carriage, Sir Richard felt half inclined to break off his ill-assorted connection. Though Matilda was dearer to him than ever, he could scarcely surmount his disgust at the coarseness of mind of those with whom she was associating. The spotless feathers of the dove contract no defilement from the rude materials of her nest; and Matilda had escaped, as by a miracle, the slightest tinge of vulgarity. But he could not help fearing that she shared in some slight degree the misgivings and mistrusts of her father. At some moments, it was with difficulty he forbore exclaiming, "If you consider me a monster of cruelty and deceit, it is not yet too late. I am ready to break off our engagement."

But the angelic expression of Matilda's eyes arrested the words on his lips. A life of peace and happiness was unfolded in the serenity of those lovely features; and it was his duty to bear much, in gratitude for the affection of so sweet a wife.

Already he had enjoyed the triumph of announcing to the Norman family his approaching marriage with a beautiful girl of seventeen, with a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, amassed, indeed, in trade, but subject to no reproach on that score from the banker of Lothbury. They knew that young Norman was not to be Sir Giles, or Miss Agatha, Lady Norman, and had been forced to issue from their strong closet, at his order, the precious

family diamonds, heirlooms long marked as their own.

On passing for the last time through the dingy toll-bar adjoining the factory of Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset, and Co., Sir Richard secretly protested that his lovely bride should return no more to that city of soot and calcination. Her brothers were at school; her sisters still in the nursery. She had no bosom friendships to attach her to the place; no ties of kindred or sentiment. Henceforward, his idolized Matilda should forget her own people and her father's house; forget the sound of the factory-bell, its squalid population, its baleful exhalations; and become exclusively, for better for worse, Lady Norman of Selwood Manor.

Could there be a stronger proof of the inappropriateness of the connection, than that the first resolution to which it gave rise was an outrage against the first and holiest duty of nature?

CHAPTER IV.

What! will the line stretch to the crack of doom? Another yet?—a seventh?—I'll see no more! SHAKSPEARE.

YEARS passed away with their alternations of joy and sorrow, day and night; and Sir Richard still admitted himself to be,

according to common parlance, the happiest of men.

It was amazing with what facility Matilda had glided, under his authority, into the social duties of her new vocation. At the close of a few months, no one would have suspected her of having moved in any lower sphere than that of the Manor-House. Her docile nature instinctively adopted her husband's habits and pursuits; and when they occasionally joined the convivial meetings of their thin and scattered neighbourhood, the unpretending elegance of Lady Norman's manners was even more applauded than her beauty. Lord and Lady Farleigh invariably cited her to their London friends, as the most distinguished ornament of the county.

Sir Richard, meanwhile, had evidently exhausted his taste for frivolous dissipation. Happy in his home, he devoted himself to the cultivation of his estate, to study, to field-sports. Cheered by the society of his wife, there was no further occasion to forfeit his self-consequence by jostling in the tawdry mob of fashionable London. By mutual consent, they abjured

all connection with the metropolis.

It was but natural that Sir Richard's disappointed heir-presumptive should attribute this secession from the world to consciousness of having formed a mésalliance. But the Normans were mistaken. Sir Richard had ceased to regard Matilda as aught but a portion of his aristocratic self; and, as his wife, she was entitled to her share of worldly honours. The susceptibilities of his self-love were suffering from wounds of a very

different nature.

The Catholic cause was just then at its lowest ebb. Long reduced to insignificance in the court and councils of their Tory sovereign, the Catholics had been recently compelled to withdraw their trust from the Regent. Their prospects were narrower than at any preceding moment; and in proportion as hope declined, the ardour of their fraternization became more vehement. Sir Richard redoubled his contributions to their funds; became a member and correspondent of their societies; and fought over the question of Emancipation every evening, with a worthy neighbour named Mandeville (the original pos-

sessor of Selwood Cottage), till Matilda became a political, if

not a religious, convert.

Once every year, on his way to town for the annual settlement of the affairs of the firm, Mr. Maule visited the Manor-House, to rejoice in his daughter's happiness, and gratify his pride by the sight of her prosperity. His parental exhortations to Lady Norman were brief but comprehensive, "Not to forget her Maker, not to forget herself;" and though he declined trusting her little sisters on a visit to the Manor, within grasp of the Abbé O'Donnel, he never presumed to trifle with the religious or political prejudices of his son-in-law, after his first visit to the picture-gallery and chapel of Selwood. He seemed to understand that the Catholicism of the Normans was

a legitimate portion of their inheritance.

All went smoothly among them till one unlucky day, when (an auspicious letter from his illustrious friend Mr. Grattan, having put Sir Richard into unusual spirits) he was rash enough to suggest an invitation that Tom Cruttenden should accompany his partner, on Mr. Maule's ensuing periodical journey; and though indignant that the invitation should have been so long delayed, the old gentleman's desire of once more beholding "poor Matty's pretty face," induced him to array himself in a new snuff-coloured suit with brass buttons, and ensconce himself in a corner of his partner's post-chaise. But, alsa! before he had been half a day in the house, there was no longer peace in Israel; and Matilda trembled for the sequel. The jocose old gentleman had discovered that even at Selwood there existed a raw on which his whips and scorns could fall with agonizing force, and to spare, was an effort beyond his generosity. The Normans had been eight years married, and had no family. What an opportunity for a licensed jester! Old Tom was never weary of inquiring, with a knowing wink, in what part of the house the nursery was situated; where was Master Norman's rocking-horse, and little Miss Matty's doll; till Matilda, who had hitherto resigned herself patiently to the want of children, could scarcely restrain her tears.

Nor was he less jocose with Sir Richard, on the barbarity of moping up his pretty wife in a tumble-down old countryhouse, "which, to say the best of it, was as lively as a house of

correction."

"I recollect when you was at the factory before your wedding," said the spiteful old bachelor, "we thought it vastly pretty of you to present poor Matty with a parcel of diamond necklaces and gimeracks, in which we fancied you meant her of figure at court. Who'd have thought after this, of your making her a state-prisoner? Why, she led a merrier life at Brummagem, taking her pleasurings with Mrs. Wickset; to say nothing of Christmas hops at Mr. Blowpipe's, up at the foundry."

"I have lost all inclination for balls and races," interrupted

Lady Norman, growing uneasy. "I am growing old. You forget that I shall be seven-and-twenty next birthday."

"Indeed I don't, Matty. Nobody can look in your face and forget that! Your fine bloom's gone, child. Your best days are over. And that's what frets me at your having moped away your youth in this out-of-the-way place, with nothing to show for it. If you'd been nursing a fine family of spanking boys all these years, I'd say something to you. I meant you, my lady, to supply me with a second godson. But I find your bottler, the control of the control brother Cruttenden's to remain my sole heir. Just as your title and fortune, it seems, must go to a distant relation, because you've been too lazy to furnish us with a young Master Dicky of your own."

The five-hundred-pound note placed by the old gentleman ext day, at parting, in Lady Norman's hands, "to make next day, at parting, in Lady Norman's hands, thread-papers of," formed a poor compensation for the wounds inflicted by this ill-timed raillery. For two days after his father-in-law's departure, Sir Richard was thoroughly out of sorts. Never had he seemed so sensitive to the mortification of seeing his inheritance descend to "an unlineal hand-no son of his succeeding." And, as if in express aggravation of the grievance, the *Morning Post* announced that week among its memorabilia, the birth of "At Grove House, Herts, the

Lady Catherine Norman, of a son and HEIR."

It was scarcely a year since the same authority had put forth intelligence of the marriage of "Giles Norman, Esq., jun., to the eldest daughter of the Right Hon. the Earl of Roscrea;"—

and already the junior branch was germinating!

Henceforward, Lady Catherine Norman, and her son and heir, were thorns in the side of Selwood Manor. Before Master Norman could run alone, a portrait of the young gentleman and his cockade appeared in the exhibition; and having been transferred to the engraved gallery of the Buds and Blossoms of our aristocratic Eden, was disseminated throughout Great Britain. Sir Richard affected to laugh to scorn the vanity of his kinsfolk. But his laughter was lip-deep, and pain and

grief were in his heart.

It was noticed by Matilda that the Baronetage and Red Book of 1812 (in which was inscribed, in addition to the particulars of his own birth and marriage, and the usual "HEIR-PRESUMPTIVE, Giles Norman, Esq., of Grove Park, Herts;" the birth among the collateral branches of the family of Giles, the son of Giles Norman, Esq., by Lady Catherine, daughter to the Earl of Rosorea), was suffered to lie with unout leaves on the library-table. Nay, the plans previously sent in by his architect, for two fine new lodges to his park, were rolled up, knotted with red tape, and permanently laid on the shelf. To the great disappointment of Mr. Stucco, the baronet's zeal for the improvement of his estate had suddenly subsided.

Unluckily for Matilda, in the midst of all these irritations, Mr. Mandeville, the neighbour at Selwood Cottage who had hitherto shared with her the ebullitions of her husband's ill-humour, was compelled to quit Worcestershire and reside upon his Irish estates; and in the course of that solitary, taciturn, peevish winter, she began, for the first time, to suspect that the sun of her happiness might be overclouded. She began to dread Sir Richard's return home from his morning's sport; to fear that the family at Farleigh Castle might notice how often his cutting remarks brought tears into her eyes; and just before the next annual visit of her father, became so alarmed lest her husband's moroseness should attract his attention, and draw down the animadversion of Tom Cruttenden, as to invent some trifling pretext for evading the visit of Mr. Maule; pretending to have formed engagements from having mistaken the date of his arrival.

But Matilda was an unpractised and a bad dissembler. Tom Cruttenden, seeing through her shallow excuses, insisted that her father should proceed to the Manor-House as usual, and ascertain the motive of her deceit. And there, according to their anticipations, Lady Norman and her husband were detected, without guests or engagements. Old Maule scarcely waited to be alone with his daughter, to reproach her bitterly

with her disingenuousness.

"When you were a young child, Matilda," said the old gentleman, "you would have died rather than utter an untruth. Is it because you are a baronet's lady, that you think yourself privileged to bear false-witness to your poor despised tradesman of a father? Equivocation, Lady Norman, is a lower and meaner thing than the lowest of callings! A falsehood returns sooner or later to the bosom of him who utters it, like a viper flung into his face. But, as my friend Cruttenden was saying to me the night before I left home, 'All this was to be expected. Matty's been taken out of her own condition and creed, and what good was like to come of it? Isn't she under the control of an old Jesuit of a priest? Isn't she already half a Papist?'"

Matilda was unable to repress an impatient movement of

dissent

"I don't say that you attend chapel, or tell your beads, or believe in transubstantiation," cried the old man, repeating the words of the oracular Tom Cruttenden; "but you have learned to say one thing, and think another; and if that's not the true

meaning of being a Jesuit, I don't know what is."

Again Matilda remonstrated. But her father was not to be propitiated. He came in mistrust, and quitted her in anger; protesting that her sister Betsy, who had now almost attained to womanhood, should never incur the risk of contamination by becoming her sister's inmate at the Manor.

And thus, in proportion as Matilda stood in need of the countenance and affection of her family, was she fated to estrange their regard. She had only to resign herself to a dreary perspective of seclusion and isolation; enjoying her happiest moments when she could persuade her husband to enliven his monotonous life by a trip to town, which secured

her for a time from his irritability.
So stood matters at the Manor-House when, ten years after the celebration of Sir Richard's childless union, the sudden downfall of Napoleon gave rise to the unexpected pacification of Europe. Eager to revisit the religious community from which he had been so long estranged, the Abbé O'Donnel immediately determined on an excursion to Paris; when Matilda suggested to her husband that it might interest him to review the scenes of his boyhood, and take a glance at the long-closed city of revolutionized, republicanized, and reroyalized France.

Weary of the inactivity of an aimless existence, Sir Richard Norman needed little persuasion to comply with the suggestion. At that moment arrived General Trevor's letter, announcing the Ravenscrofts as likely to become most desirable neighbours; and, finding his wife thus opportunely provided with com-paniouship for the summer, he had no longer any scruple in

taking his departure, or prolonging his absence.

He went, the Ravenscrofts came, and Matilda grew contented and happy. A new existence dawned upon her in the society of such kind and conciliating friends. Sir Richard's return was again and again deferred; and she was careful to find no fault with the postponement. Attributing to the false position in which he was placed by his disproportioned marriage, the fractiousness into which he had latterly degenerated, she felt convinced that change of scene and society would restore him to his happier self.

The prolongation of his absence, however, gradually softened, and at length obliterated all recollection of his harshness. At the close of three months' absence, she remembered him as the impassioned lover of her youth, the affectionate husband of her early domestic life; not as the angry man resenting upon herself the jokes of Tom Cruttenden. To the Ravenscrofts, therefore, she described him in glowing colours. His portrait announced him to them as one of the handsomest men in England; and Matilda protested that the merits of his character more than

rivalled those of his picture.

Their interest thus excited in his favour, the strangers grew almost anxious at the frequent postponement of his return; more especially as, whenever his long absence was alluded to at Farleigh Castle, a significant glance was apt to pass between Lady Emily and her brother, Lord Selsdon, the meaning of which was a mystery to the new comers. Again and again did the baronet announce his immediate arrival, and again and again disappoint them. Sophy Ravenscroft often started up from her drawing and ran to the window, in the notion that his travelling-carriage was passing the cottage palings, on its way to the lodge-gate of the park. And when, on the day succeeding her ramble with Lady Norman to the ruins of the forge at Avonwell, no Sir Richard made his appearance, they became alternately alarmed and indignant. Sophy felt sure some accident had occurred. Mrs. Ravenscroft, apprehending mischief more serious, shook her head and said nothing; and on learning the following evening that Lady Norman was still alone, walked up kindly with her daughter after dinner, to drink tea uninvited at the Manor.

On their arrival, Matilda was in tears. Like themselves, she had begun to apprehend that something was amiss; and finding her so thoroughly discouraged, the Ravenscrofts made it their duty to cheer her spirits by reassurances. An equinoctial gale was blowing so boisterously, as to render it prohable that Sir Richard was delayed at Calais, and necessary that Lady Norman should order her carriage to be in readiness at eleven, to convey back her friends across the park; and the inclemency of the weather without had its usual effect within, of inducing them to close sociably round the fire. Immediately after tea, Sophia was persuaded to take her seat at the piano; Mrs. Ravenscroft drew forth her ever-ready knitting; while Matilda placed

herself for a moment on a low ottoman before the fire, to caress a favourite pointer which was basking in the warmth of the hearth.

It happened that, between the waltzes and marches with which she was amusing them, Miss Ravenscroft paused to relate a lively anecdote connected with one of the pieces; and her companions were vying with each other in applause and laughter at the mimicry with which the gay girl enlivened her narrative, when, lo! unobserved by any of the party, the door flew open, and there, folded in his travelling cloak, stood Sir Richard

Norman, an unnoticed spectator of their mirth.

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CHAPTER V.

Churlishness is a spurious kind of freedom. TACITUS.

It is a trying thing, even to a good-tempered man, to arrive at home from a cold, hurried, hungry journey, and find everything proceeding there as if the master were forgotten; nothing in readiness for him, nothing distressed or disorganized by his

absence.

But Sir Richard Norman was not a good-tempered man. Rendered arbitrary by early independence, selfish by subsequent indulgence, and fretful by the reminiscences of a wasteful dissolute youth, he had now his family disappointments to aggravate former defects. He had scarcely patience to conceal his indignation at finding his wife indulging in the silly levity of a school-girl, when his protracted absence ought to have filled her with consternation. Her recent letters to Paris had described her as all anxiety for his return. Yet he was evidently not cared for, not expected, not welcomed, as became the allegiance of a loving wife.

As these reflections passed rapidly through his mind, he was half inclined to re-enter the carriage, and return to the place from whence he came. But the spare form and grave countenance of the Abbé O'Donnel met his wiew, as he turned to quit the room; and immediately recovering his self-possession, he advanced into the circle, and claimed the greetings of the astonished party. Too well-bred to exhibit dissatisfaction in presence of strangers, he received with courtesy his introduction to Mrs. Ravenscroft and her daughter; but already he had conceived against them a sort of jealous antipathy. They were more familiar than himself with Lady Norman; and more at

home than himself at Selwood Manor.

The Ravenscrofts, meanwhile, were thoroughly embarrassed by knowing themselves to be in the way. Some time must elapse before the carriage could be ready to take them home; and their constraint of manner was considered by Sir Richard as intended to mark the annoyance inflicted upon the happy

little party by his presence.

Delayed by adverse winds, the travellers had been in some peril, much perplexity; and in the fear of inflicting further uneasiness on Lady Norman, had come direct from London without even pausing for refreshment on the road. Supper was to be prepared in haste; when as one footman was busy

carrying up Sir Richard's baggage, and another conveying a message to the stables to hasten the carriage, the butler took care to be as long and awkward as possible in the removal of the tea-things; to mark his sense of injury at the labours

thrust upon his shoulders.

Matilda, meanwhile, startled out of all self-possession by the unexpected arrival of her husband, found the words of welcome falter upon her lips. One moment, she was about to give way to her spontaneous delight in welcoming home her beloved husband; the next, she was chilled back into reserve, by the

clouds gathering upon his brow.

Meanwhile, but for a conversation got up between Mrs. Ravenscroft and the Abbé, a dead silence must have ensued; and it was a relief to Matilda when the carriage carried off her friends. Sir Richard had already retired to his room to change his damp dress, leaving her leisure for the recovery of her spirits. But, alas! further mischiefs were in progress. All expectation of his arrival having ceased at so late an hour, no preparations had been made for the travellers. The only fire burning was in the small bedroom in which, during his absence, Lady Norman had taken refuge from the vastness of their state apartment; and accepting this accidental circumstance as an intimation that he was to inhabit it alone, he turned indignantly away, and ordered the camp-bed in his

dressing-room to be prepared for his use.

Deeply mortified by the coolness of his reception, which he attributed to suspicions and resentments which had never entered the candid mind of Matilda, he snatched up the gauntlet he supposed to have been thrown down to him, and prepared to act on the defensive. After supping tête-à-tête with the Abbé in the chilly dining-room, where the fire had been so imperfectly rekindled that he rejected Lady Norman's proposal of bearing them company, he retired to his chamber for the night; and Matilda, after waiting some time for his return to the saloon, took refuge silently in her own. Before morning,

the husband and wife had taken their resolution.

"I understand the terms on which she has vouchsafed my pardon!" mused Sir Richard. "She knows all,—probably through the tale-bearing of these Ravenscrofts; and, too politic to resent, is too much of a woman to pardon. Be it so! I will not stoop to entreat a more generous extension of her forgiveness.

Absence has completed the alienation commenced by indifference!" was, on the other hand, Matilda's mournful meditation. "It is something that he has deigned to return home, and is disposed to live with me as a friend. I will not aggra-

vate his dislike by vexatious explanations.

There was no longer confidence between them; and rarely does perfect unreserve subsist between a Protestant and a Catholic. However nearly united by the bonds of personal affection, a shadow of reserve on one part and mistrust on the other, darkens their attachment. A sort of mysterious inter-course seemed established between Sir Richard and his priest, which Lady Norman vainly attempted to fathom. Aware how vehemently the Abbé had argued with his pupil against his marriage, she concluded that he was still her enemy; and in their moments of more confiding affection, had once playfully remarked to her husband that, were not divorce (the sacrament of adultery, as it is powerfully defined by the Roman Catholics) contrary to the canons of his church, she was convinced the Abbé O'Donnel would sooner or later persuade him to put away his Protestant wife.

This feeling of mistrust was now powerfully renewed. Sir Richard, after passing some months abroad, in the company of the Abbé, had returned more cold and reserved than ever. Involuntarily she recalled to mind Tom Cruttenden's remark at his last visit to the Manor: "Mark my words, Matty, that you will repent keeping that Jesuit of a priest about your house, like a pet rat or tame snake. He would drown you in the Severn to-morrow, if heretics could be made away with without judge, jury, and condemning-cap. Beware, I tell you, of Father O'Donnel."

To resist or resent the Abhé's influence, however, either now or at any other time, was she knew impossible; and Matilda, with patient humility, resigned herself to coming evil. She subdued her feelings sufficiently to appear at breakfast the following morning, with smiles upon her countenance; and tried to talk away her embarrassment by a thousand unmeaning inquiries to the travellers, concerning the diversions and habits of the continent.

"You will shortly see and judge for yourself," said Sir Richard abruptly. "Unless you have some reasonable objection to urge, I intend to pass the winter on the continent."

Matilda's first emotion at this startling announcement, was grief at the idea of a separation from her new friends. But she mastered it sufficiently to reply, in pursuance of her system of conciliation, "Pass the winter abroad? It will give me great pleasure. Where do you think of settling? When do you intend to set off?"

"In about a fortnight. As soon as I have completed my arrangements here for a long absence. I wish to fix myself at Paris. But I would not engage a residence there till I had

consulted your wishes.

Had Matilda at that moment glanced towards the Abbé, whom she was secretly accusing as the author of the plan, she might have discerned, from the amazed and displeased expression of his countenance, that this was his first intimation of the intentions of Sir Richard. But her attention was riveted by the

unexpected courtesy of her husband's last remark.

"How kind of you," said she, "to make my taste a consideration. I am delighted at the thoughts of visiting Paris; and, by the time you have fixed, shall be quite at your disposal for the journey.

The Abbé was almost provoked by this ready acquiescence; Sir Richard almost disposed to think her submissive tone ironical. After finishing their breakfast in silence, the rest of the day was devoted by the baronet to visiting his estate, and inquiring into the state of affairs during his absence; while the Abbé set off into Lancashire, on a journey connected with his professional duties. Gladly would Matilda have accompanied her husband on his round of the farms, to contribute her mite to the intelligence afforded by the bailiff. But she hesitated to make the proposal, till his horse was brought to the door. And having received no invitation to ride with him, fancied her presence might be importunate. She announced therefore her intention of setting off to visit the Ravenscrofts.

"She might at least have spared me this one day," thought Sir Richard, who, having expected her to propose riding, concluded that she disdained to affect an interest in his pursuits. "She has been meeting these poople hourly for the last three months, yet cannot withdraw her attention from them a single morning in favour of her husband!"

All the contrition which had been softening his heart on his way back to his long-neglected home, hardened into adamant as he came to the conclusion that Matilda had no heart; that she neither resented injuries, nor was sensible to the prompt-

ings of repentant affection.

Meanwhile, the startling intelligence conveyed by Matilda to Selwood Cottage was of a nature to dispel the awkwardness anticipated by the Ravenscrofts, in having to satisfy her curiosity respecting the impression produced on them by her husband. Her sudden departure was an affliction too over-

powering to leave them leisure for embarrassment.

"Our arrival in Worcestershire, my dear Lady Norman, seems to have driven you out of the country!" said Mrs. Ravenscroft, sympathizing with the tears already falling from the eyes of her daughter. "To think that you should have remained quietly stationary at Selwood for the last eleven years, and take your departure the very first winter of our arrival!"

"It is indeed provoking," replied Matilda. "Had Selwood borrowed no attraction from your settling near us, I should have been enchanted at the prospect of my tour. But as it is— My dear Mrs. Ravenscroft," cried she, suddenly interrupting herself—"supposing you were to follow our example, and meet us at Paris? Sir Richard assures me that nothing can exceed its brilliancy at the present moment; full of foreign troops, foreign princes, foreign tourists; movement, life, amusement,

and excitement.

"Too full, I fancy, for the prudent mother of a giddy mother." renlied Mrs. Ravenscroft, with a smile. "Two daughter," replied Mrs. Ravenscroft, with a smile. helpless women, like ourselves, are best and safest in the quiet seclusion of Selwood Cottage. I should not feel justified in so capriciously abandoning the home which it has cost me both money and pains to adjust to my liking.

"If my indiscretion be the chief obstacle, dear mamma." cried Sophy, who would willingly have spent the winter in Nova Zembla, for the sake of passing it with her friend, "I promise not to urge you into the smallest expense or dissipation—not to fall in love with a foreigner, or——"

"My dear, it is wholly out of the question," interrupted Mrs. Ravenscroft, in a tone to silence all further discussion. For she had already seen enough of Sir Richard to feel per-suaded that such an addition to his family circle would be altogether unacceptable.

"At all events," persisted Matilda, satisfied by this positive assertion that she had no chance of beguiling her friends into an excursion to the continent, "let me see you every day till my departure; or you will have no opportunity of forming an acquaintance with Sir Richard. You must come and dine with

us to-day."

"I fear it will not be in our power."

"Pray, pray do not refuse me, now that I have only a fort-night to remain in Worcestershire.—Pray come and dine with us."

"My dear young friend," replied Mrs. Ravenscroft, who, seeing in Matilda, in spite of her eight-and-twenty years, a wholly inexperienced creature, could not refrain from treating her like a daughter of her own, "your company belongs this day to your husband. After so long a separation, you have no right to withdraw your attention from Sir Richard Norman."

Matilda blushed deeply at this admonition. She had too much delicacy to reveal the estrangement arising from her past and present conjugal differences. The subject was too sacred to be made a matter of feminine confidence. She dared not admit how much she dreaded a tête-à-tête with Sir Richard, or how deeply she had been wounded by his ungraciousness. Matilda was of opinion that the anguish of spirit experienced by an injured wife is to be intrusted only to Him from whom no secrets are hid.

All that remained, therefore, was submission. She returned home more dispirited than ever, and sat down to dinner, almost trembling, with one whose deportment, instead of being improved by his sojourn in the city of the Graces, afforded a strange example of the courtesy and high-breeding she had been vaunting for the last three months to her friends at

Selwood Cottage.

"Did you go much into society at Paris?" she inquired, some minutes after they had taken their seats at table, lest their taciturnity should provoke the comments of the servants.

"I was seldom alone," was Sir Richard's evasive reply.

"But, did you attend any of the splendid entertainments

given by the Duke of Wellington, or the foreign princes?"

"I believe I enumerated to you in my letters nearly all my

engagements."

It must have been highly interesting to you to visit your old college. Did you find any person surviving who was there in your time?"

"Twenty years added to the lives of men of twenty or thirty is no such awful lapse of time," replied Sir Richard. "You seem to consider me a very venerable personage."
"I ought not to do that," replied Matilda, "since I am not

much more than ten years your junior."

"I have not forgotten that you are ten years younger than myself," said Sir Richard scornfully. "There was no occasion to recall the circumstance to my recollection."

Matilda coloured with shame and confusion. To disguise the annoyance of her feelings, she recommenced her inquiries

concerning Paris.

"Did you find the public buildings much handsomer than those of London?"

"That is a point so universally conceded," replied her husband, still more ungraciously, "that it is scarce worth bringing

anew into discussion."

"The French ladies, then," demanded Matilda, taking refuge, with deepening blushes, in the first topic that presented itself; "are they so very superior to my own countrywomen

as I have heard them represented?'

Sir Richard examined her a moment in silence with a severe and scrutinizing eye. "Decidedly superior," was his stern reply, conceiving himself to be subjected to a process of premeditated cross-examination. "Not in mere features or complexion. Refined in soul as in deportment, they are as companionable in private life as brilliant in public. A dull or ill-bred Frenchwoman is as great a rarity as a conversational Englishwoman."

Matilda was silenced. There was nothing in her husband's words that conveyed absolute reproach to herself. But his looks and manner gave personal significance to them, as an attack upon her own uncompanionableness and want of refinement. She saw that she had given offence. It would be better to avoid all further allusion to Paris. But in flying from

Scylla, she stumbled of course upon Charybdis.

"I sat some time with the Ravenscrofts this morning," said

"I tried to persuade them to join us at dinner; but

they would not hear of it."

"I am sorry to have been the means of frightening your friends out of the house," replied her husband. "They seem to have been passing the greater part of the last three months under my roof; and the day of my return, they decline, for the first time, your invitation."

"Mrs. Ravenscroft fancied you might have more to say to

me, after being so long away, than you would like to communicate before strangers," said Matilda, in a faltering voice.
"Indeed!" rejoined Sir Richard, with another scrutinizing glance. "The old lady seems to be an adept in the mysteries

of human nature. I must be on my guard."

"My friend Sophy is inconsolable at the thoughts of our leaving Worcestershire. Our absence this winter will make a sad difference at Selwood," observed Lady Norman, after another awkward pause.

"It was judicious to select Selwood, if they were looking for a sociable neighbourhood," replied Norman. "If they wanted balls and card-parties, why not settle at Cheltenham

or Bath?"

"I tried to persuade them to an excursion to Paris."

"To Paris? But they have no idea, I suppose, of any such wildgoose expedition?" rejoined Sir Richard, in a tone plainly indicating an intention to remain at the Manor-House, should

her answer be affirmative.

"None whatever. Mrs. Ravenscroft does not think it prudent to leave home so soon after settling here. Besides, she will not be quite solitary. There are the Lynches, there is Farleigh Castle.

"With eight miles of bad road intervening, Farleigh Castle

is likely to be a vast acquisition to Selwood Cottage."

"The Ravenscrofts do not regard the distance. almost fancy it less than formerly. I have dined four or five times this summer with the Farleighs.

"They must have thought it singular that you, who invariably make excuses when I am here, should seize the oppor-

tunity of my absence to be so vastly intimate.

"Lady Farleigh probably concluded that, finding my home less attractive. I was glad to seek amusement elsewhere.

"A flattering interpretation for her, certainly," oried Sir Richard, overlooking the interpretation so flattering to himself.

"Besides," continued Matilda, assuming some spirit when she found herself systematically browheaten, "I was only prevented by my natural shyness from visiting at Farleigh Castle; and my terrors of Lady Farleigh's hauteur and Lady Emily's reserve vanished the moment I found myself familiarized in the house by accompanying the Ravenscrofts. Mrs. Ravenscroft, you know, is nearly related to Lady Farleigh.

"I should not have imagined that Lady Norman of Selwood Manor needed the patronage of a Mrs. Ravenscroft to render her company acceptable," said Sir Richard, haughtily. "My father and grandfather were the intimate friends of those of Lord Farleigh; and your indolence has alone prevented my keeping up an intimacy with the family. You used to complain of the coldness of Lady Farleigh and Emily.

"Till lately, I misunderstood their characters. The cordial manners of my own humble sphere had not prepared me for the reserve of theirs. I fancied them indifferent and repulsive when they were showing me the quiet kindness habitual to

Mrs. Ravenscroft taught me to see all this."

"You consider Mrs. Ravenscroft, then, better skilled than your husband in the habits of good society? You never condescended to ask instruction of me."

"I might not wish to remind you of my unfitness to appear

in the world as the representative of your honours."

Sir Richard's silence seemed to reject every occasion afforded

him by his wife to interpose some conciliating word.

"You were aware when you married me," she continued, stung to courage by his unkindness, "that I had never lived in the world. The sphere into which you introduced me was full of mysteries and perplexities to my simple comprehension. All you wished me to understand, I thought you would explain unasked.'

"I am sorry to have left so heavy a task of instruction to Mrs. Ravenscroft," said Norman, with a contemptuous smile.

"There are some lessons which a woman learns more readily from a woman," said Matilda; "particularly those which she considers beneath the dignity of a man."

The vexation of having to defend herself thus perseveringly, suffused the usually delicate cheeks of Lady Norman with so radiant a tinge, that her eyes borrowed fresh lustre from her bloom; and as she shook back the clustering ringlets from her face, Sir Richard was struck by the extreme loveliness of her countenance. Renovated by a cheerful summer of exercise and independence, Matilda looked younger and more captivating than ever to eyes recently habituated to the olive-hued charms of the French ladies, and the mahogany complexions of the peasantry.

When she quitted him to order coffee in the drawing-room, Sir Richard sat musing uneasily over the probability that she had been much admired at Farleigh Castle, and the certainty that she would command the worship of the brilliant coteries of

Paris.

CHAPTER VI.

Inst time was, once, when thou un-urg'd wouldst vow That never words were music to thine ear, That never object pleasing to thine eye, That never touch well-welcome to thy hand, That never meat sweet-savour'd to thy taste, Unless I spake, look'd, touch'd, or cav'd to thee. How comes it, then, my husband, oh! how comes it, That thou art thus estranged from thyself?

SHAKSPEARE.

Conscious, perhaps, of the ungracious part he had borne in their dinner conversation, Sir Richard, on repairing to the book-room, where they were accustomed to pass their winter evenings, affected a vehement anxiety to examine two numbers of the Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews, which had appeared during his absence; containing able articles upon Emancipation, by the leading dialecticians of the day.

He could not, however, pass over without an ironical compliment to the literary taste of Lady Norman the fact that their pages were still uncut. Then, having taken the folder in his hand, he ensconced himself in his reading-chair beside his reading-lamp, with his foot on his reading-stool, and justified her indifference by dozing through the first half-dozen pages of the first article, and falling sound asleep over the remainder.

The moment Matilda became convinced by his attitude that he was really lost in slumber, she laid down the work with which she had been striving to beguile her uneasy thoughts, and gazed unembarrassed upon her husband. It was the first time she had steadily contemplated Sir Richard since his return; and she was struck by the havoc which three short months had effected in his appearance. There were lines of age about the eyes; a certain hollowness of brow, and gray hairs scattered among the raven locks shading his temples, which she had never noticed there before. Though advancing towards forty, Sir Richard had hitherto preserved a singularly youthful appearance. There was now a cast of care and anxiety in his face. It was impossible to look upon him without perceiving that the time of his absence must have been an unquiet Persons more experienced in the world might have detected the withering touch of remorse in those premature But Matilda had a soul above suspicion; she indications. knew that other men had their vices and foibles; that gambling, libertinism, or intemperance, might impair their fortunes, their reputations, their peace of mind. But nothing of this kind, she fancied, would even affix a stigma upon Sir Richard Norman.

Few women, however sagacious or versed in the ways of the world, bring their wisdom to bear upon the incidents of their married life. Elsewhere shrewd and farsighted, there they are invariably dupes. For the happiness of the world, it is ordained that the heart, rather than the mind, shall instigate our judgment of those with whom we live in intimate communion.

Still, there was sufficient to distress the gentle heart of Lady Norman, in the supposition that her husband had been unhappy. The moment such an idea entered her mind, she would willingly have entreated his pardon for even the slight show of resentment she had hazarded in reply to his animadversions. She longed to creep to his side as formerly, and watch for his awaking; then, entreat to know the subject of his griefs, that she might divide the burthen. But womanly instinct warned her to forbear. The peculiar position in which they stood, forbade, on her part, all advances. She must wait patiently till it pleased him to vouchsafe his confidence.

Her patience, however, was fated to be put to the test. Day followed day, but not a step towards the restoration of a better understanding. Her time was passed between solacing the affliction caused at Selwood Cottage by her approaching departure, and concealing from the observation of her friends the surliness of the man she had been so long vaunting to them as

a model of amiability.

Impossible, however, for the Ravenscrofts to deceive themselves as to the unavowed uneasiness of their charming friend.

"So we are to lose our neighbours at the Manor House this winter?" said Lady Emily Farleigh, when visiting the cottage with her brother, after riding over to offer their adieu to the Normans. "You will miss them sadly. But we shall profit by their absence. You will be obliged to have recourse twice as often for society to the Castle."

"I should deeply regret their departure," replied Mrs. Ravenscroft, "but that Lady Norman will benefit by the change. She has seen too little of the world to be immured

for life at the Manor."

"And with that sullen disagreeable man," added Sophy, breaking off the conversation in which she had been engaged with Lord Selsdon. "I am convinced she leads a wretched life with him!"

"Never pronounce hastily upon the domestic happiness of married people," remonstrated her sager mother. "She could not be so strongly attached to a man who was permanently unkind to her."

"Norman is a gentlemanly fellow," added Lord Selsdon; "a little reserved and stately, but full of honourable feeling." know only at battues and justice-meetings," cried Lady Emily, parodying with a smile the lesson of Mrs. Ravenscroft. "Till you arrived here," she added, turning towards her friends, "and drew out the real disposition of Lady Norman, we totally mistook her. Everything at the Manor was so dull, so insipid, that we set her down as a very stupid woman. But now we have discovered how pleasant she can be in her husband's absence, how sociable, how ingratiating—we perceive where the fault lies."

"Did Lady Norman tell you how long they think of remaining on the continent?" inquired Mrs. Ravenscroft, apprehensive that her daughter, thus encouraged, might give vent to

her feelings of dislike towards Sir Richard.

"We had very little conversation with her. Sir Richard was present, who is always a restraint; and before we had been ten minutes in the house, her father arrived on an unexpected visit, and we left them in haste, feeling that she must

wish to be alone with him."

Little did Lady Norman's young friends suspect that her interviews with her father were becoming almost as unsatisfactory as those with her husband. Shrinking from the interpogations suggested by old Cruttenden, Matilda's natural timidity, magnified into a foible by the despotism of Sir Richard, rendered all social intercourse a tax upon her sincerity. The old gentleman's unexpected journey proved to have been, as usual, suggested by the injurious intermeddling of his partner.

"Ay, ay, I knew how it would be; I thought it would end so," was Tom's exclamation, on learning from Mr. Maule the

intended departure of the Normans for the continent.

"You did not foresee anything of the sort," replied the old gentleman, fractiously. "No one would have scouted the idea more than yourself, had I predicted last winter that peace would be restored to Europe within twelve months, Nap caged in the island of Elba, and the English free to come and go in foreign parts."

"I wasn't thinking of Nap—I wasn't thinking of the island of Elbow; my thoughts were nearer home," replied Cruttenden. "I was recollecting that, when you first told me of this precious son-in-law of yours being a Papist, I saw, as plainly as I see it now, that poor Matty would be perverted out of her religious principles."

"Matty perverted out of her religious principles!" cried Maule, lowering his spectacles, and peering over them in amazement. "What can have put such a suspicion into your

head?"
"If the thing an't done already, 'twon't be long a-doing.
When the poor lass gets smuggled over to France, and finds herself surrounded with Capuchins and Jesuits, telling their

beads all day long, smothered with incense, and bothered out of her right mind, what chance is there of her resisting? I've heard tell of the most awful means being used to convert poor weak women, who thought proper to adhere to their own Church."

"Centuries ago, perhaps," interrupted Elizabeth Maule, who was presiding at the tea-table of the partners. "But the days of persecution are past; or if they still exist, surely the Catholies have as much cause to complain of the Protestants as

the Protestants of the Catholics."

"Ay, ay, in this country, thank God, the Church has still the best of it," cried Cruttenden, with one of his knowing winks. "We take care to keep the beggarly priests where they ought to be. No sneaking Jesuits allowed to devour the substance of old England. Church and king, and Protestant succession, say I."

"And nobody gainsays you, Mr. Cruttenden," resumed Elizabeth, a girl of sense and spirit, who sometimes raised the standard of revolt against the domestic tyrant of the house. "But that is no reason why you should have always prevented my father from allowing me to accept Matilda's invitations; or why you should try to excite his fears just now, because she is desirous of seeing something of the world."

prevented my father from allowing me to accept Matilda's invitations; or why you should try to excite his fears just now, because she is desirous of seeing something of the world."

"With respect to keeping you quietly at home when you want to be gadding, Miss Betsy," replied old Tom, in wrathful indignation, "I admit that I have taken more pains to keep you out of mischief than you are likely to thank me for. But as to standing quietly by when poor Matty is about to be carried off to pass the rest of her days among a villanous nation of cut-throats, I can't reconcile it to my conscience."

"'Tis a sad business, from beginning to end," sighed old

Maule, now seriously alarmed.

"Surely, papa," cried Elizabeth, "you do not consider my sister in danger, under the protection of her own husband?"

"How do you know that her husband mayn't be the worst enemy she has?" demanded Cruttenden, in a mysterious voice. "Because my sister speaks of him in her letters with respect and affection; and because Mrs. Wickset assures me that Sir

Richard bears the highest character in his own neighbourhood."
"Madam Wickset!—what should she know of character, unless of a housemaid or footboy? I tell you that Sir Richard's great great grandfather was nigh being strung up as an accomplice in the Gunpowder Plot. 'Tis written in history, and any one may read it there that likes. And 'twill never surprise me to find that Matty's husband and his old Jesuit of a chaplain have been following in the same steps; and if they've any such scheme in their head, the first person they're likely to make away with, will be the nearest Protestant they can lay hands on!"

"This is really too absurd!" cried Elizabeth, perceiving that the old gentleman was ready to hazard any extravagant accusation to stir up the wrath of her father, "as if in these times of publicity, of newspapers and railroads, such crimes could be committed with impunity. Matilda, at eight-and-

twenty, is not likely to be silenced like a child.'

"Silenced? If you'd ever set foot in Manor House, you'd know that the poor lass daren't say her soul's her own. See what influence he has over her mind. She has long ceased to care the scratch of her little finger for her whole family packed together. Nevertheless, she's your father's child still, though an undutiful; and I maintain that 'tis his business to prevent her being spirited off out of the country."

Such were the judicious motives which had brought Mr. Maule uninvited into Worcestershire; and having no time to waste in

circumlocution, he came straight to the point.

"I don't like the thoughts of Matty's going to settle among Papists and foreigners," said he, abruptly. "Tom Cruttenden's of opinion, Sir Richard, that, may be, you are going out of the kingdom in such a jiffey only for want of a little ready money. If that's the case, name the sum you mean to economize in the course of the next twelve months, and here's a blank cheque on

my banker to be filled up with the amount."

"There are other motives in the world, sir, than pounds, shillings, and pence, whatever you may think to the contrary!" oried Sir Richard Norman, indignant at the liberty taken with him. "I trust I am free to regulate my family affairs without reference to the whims of Mr. Cruttenden, of whose name I hope to hear no further mention in this house. Lady Norman will embark with me next week for the continent, and reside with me there so long as may suit our mutual convenience."

Sir Richard quitted the room after giving utterance to this terrific denunciation; and it was to Matilda, alone, that the father unfolded the tale of his terrors, and poured forth his vials

of wrath.

"There is no longer peace or confidence under this roof, Matty," said the old gentleman, in a piteous tone. "Such glances never passed betwirt me and your poor, dear, dead-andgone mother, as I saw cast at you just now by Sir Richard Norman. If the marriage were to do again, I'd out off my right hand before I'd give you to a man whose heart is as hard as a

stone, and whose soul is the property of his priest."

Matilda trembled as she listened. There was an earnestness in her father's manner which she had never noticed before. She almost fancied that the old man's eyes were suffused with tears. In vain did she strive, by the tenderest protestations, to soothe his irritation and compose his spirits. The main cause of his anxiety was not to be removed. She would not undertake to dissuade Sir Richard from passing the winter abroad.

"In that case, my errand here is at an end," was the old gentleman's fretful reply. "I have fulfilled my duty as a father; a daughter's duty seems to concern you no longer. Farewell, Matty! Farewell, my unhappy child! Let us hear of your welfare. Your sisters will take care that you hear of ours in return."

The old sentleman departed in his ire, and Matilda resigned herself to her sorrow. Brief as was his visit, it had served to aggravate the troubles of his daughter. Everybody seemed in league against her. The Ravenscrofts embittered her departure by their tenderness; Sir Richard and her own family by their cruelty. She was glad when the day arrived for a change of scene, air, and reflections.

CHAPTER VII.

N'est on pas las d'ambitious vulgaires De sots parés de pompeux sobriquets, D'abus, d'erreurs, de rapines, de guerres, De laquais-rois, de peuples de laquais ? BERANGER.

FORTUNATELY for Lady Norman, her cares appeared to diminish with every mile of her journey. Sir Richard became less irritable from the moment of quitting home. The estrangement between him and Matilda was less apparent to themselves and others; and on perceiving that the delight expressed by his wife in the succession of novel objects presented to her view was genuine and unaffected, he resumed his ease in her presence. Naturally light-hearted, Matilda, in the midst of new scenes and strange faces, regained the joyousness of her better days; and satisfied that she was not acting a part, he too ceased to be

an actor.

They arrived in Paris, cheerful in each other's company; prepared to be amused and to amuse. A gay little hotel was engaged for them in the Rue de Provence, where a separate suite of apartments being assigned to the Abbé O'Donnel, Lady Norman was relieved from the constraint of his presence. Paris abounded, that winter, in gay society, culled from the wealthy of every aristocracy in Europe; and independent of Sir Richard's high connections among the Roman Catholic nobility, of whom numbers had hastened to the continent, Matilda was furnished with a variety of letters of introduction, by the Countess of Farleigh, to French families of distinction, with whom she had formed an intimacy during her visit to Paris after the Peace of Amiens.

Her ladyship's friendships, however, lying chiefly among the legitimate nobility, the Normans considered themselves fortunate that accident had secured them another passport into circles where the setting sun of the glory of Napoleon still cast a refulgent light. A letter from Mrs. Ravenscroft to Admiral Guerchant, who, as prisoner of war to her gallant husband, had incurred obligations to the family, insured a cordial welcome to Matilda. Under the auspices of the admiral's excellent wife, she was as frankly initiated into the most secret sanctuaries of Bonapartism as under the hand and seal of Lady Farleigh into the clique of noble emigrants regilding the tarnished royalty of the Château.

On all sides, the Normans, rich, young, handsome, and agreeable, were hailed as additions to society. The English were still novelties in Paris. They had not yet worn out the patience of their hosts by the ostentation of their pomps and vanities, their vast superciliousness, their narrowness of mind. And among the London beauties and celebrities contending that winter for distinction, not one obtained a more heartfelt tribute of admiration than the fair, gentle, unpretending Lady Norman.

of admiration than the fair, gentle, unpretending Lady Norman.

Matilda had none of the hard, repellent, self-sufficiency of a woman of fashion; no strong prejudices, no personal conceit. And her readiness in adopting the hours, customs, and fashions of a society, the first of any magnitude in which she had moved, passed for a virtue with the Parisians. She was simplicity itself—simplicity, which, of all qualifications, is the most acceptable to persons highly artificial; and just as the plaudits of the world are known to develop the talents of a timid actor, the favour with which she was received tended to heighten the charm of her manners and conversation. Even Sir Richard was startled at the display of youthful loveliness to which habit had lately rendered him insensible; enhanced by the elegance of a Parisian toilet, and animated by the rapturous admiration of Parisian society.

"What a lovely creature is that Lady Norman!" observed Lady Arthur D. to Lady Dawlish, one of the most exclusive of English exclusives, just then established in all the pride of Tory

favour at the Tuileries.

"Lady Catherine Norman, you mean; my cousin Roscrea's

daughter?

"No; I mean Lady Norman, the wife of a Worcestershire baronet. Did you not notice her last night, at Madame de Montmorency's ball? So much delicacy of complexion—so

much freshness—so much taste!"

"I remember seeing something fair in a white satin dress, that looked like an Englishwoman, to which my son Noel was smiling and showing his teeth. But her face was new to me, and I asked no questions. One knows every one one ought to know. One knows every one worth knowing."

"Lady Norman, I assure you, is particularly worth knowing." "But where can she have lived all her life, that one never heard of her?"

"In an old family seat in the country; a very different thing

from moving in a bad set in town."

"They are people of family, then? What relation to the man who married my relation, Ledy Catherine?"

"Cousin, or something of that sort. They are all Roman

Catholics together. "Catholics? Indeed! Persons of some standing, perhaps, in their way. I had a vague sort of unfavourable impression about

a Sir Richard and Lady Norman. I fancied there was something of parvenu in the case. However, my dear Lady Arthur, since they are connected with Lady Catherine, and you are good enough to interest yourself about them, bring them to my Thursday evenings."

"They are not the sort of people to be taken anywhere. Sir Richard is armed cap-à-pie in the punctilious pride of a country baronet. The first time we all meet at the Château, I will present Lady Norman to you, and you can send cards."

"They are not worth half so much trouble," replied Lady Dawlish, listlessly. "But just as you please. One likes to have a few decent English faces at one's house, to show to the French by way of apology for the monstrous creatures calling themselves our country people they are accustomed to see."

Little suspecting on what terms her acquaintance was accepted, Lady Norman submitted to be presented to the fashionable countess by Lady Arthur D., to whom she had brought a note of introduction from Lady Emily Farleigh. And thus stamped current by being seen in conversation for some seconds with a woman who, like a drum, made a noise in the world proportionate to her hollowness, she was courted on all sides by her compatriots.

It was surprising, meanwhile, with what readiness, Sir Richard, at home so reserved, lent himself to the tide of popularity now setting in. Every night, save those devoted to the Italian opera, they joined some brilliant assembly. He encouraged his wife to gaiety and dissipation, by reminding her that, in Paris, she was deprived of the fireside comforts of Selwood

Manor.

Between breakfast and dinner, the Normans soldom met. Sir Richard probably devoted his mornings to literary researches, or the public monuments of the capital. But Matilda had many intimate associates to beguile the moments of his absence; among whom were his relation, Mrs. Lockwood, a beauty on the wane, devoted to the mysteries of the toilet; and the Comtesse de Montrond, a fashionable intrigante, devoted to the mysteries of the State. Lady Norman's merits obtained far higher favour amid

the dignified sobriety of the Faubourg St. Germain, than those of her pseudo-patronesses, Lady Dawlish and Lady Arthur D. She could converse, which the latter could not; she could listen, which the former could not; and was a more welcome companion than either. But from the sparkling of these gay fire-flies of fashion Matilda was often glad to escape, to the oldfashioned hotel in the Place Royale, to which Admiral Guer-chant had retired, on the downfall of the emperor and the cessation of his ministerial functions; with his homely parents, the type of his original obscurity; his worthy, active, intelligent wife, the type of his energetic career; and his accomplished children, the type of the honours to which it had elevated his old age. Though suffering deeply from the ruin of their cause and prospects, the Guerchants maintained their habits of cheerfulness and modest hospitality. Matilda found collected round their fireside, the political, military, and literary calebrities whose efforts had been fostered by the liberality of Napoleon, rays still emanating from the brightness of his glory. She rejoiced in meeting these people; in hearing them converse; in finding them render the tribute of honour and affection to the fallen man, whom it was the pitiful policy of England to vilify and depreciate.

It was at the Hotel Guerchant only, that she heard Frenchwomen converse without affectation, and saw them obtain from the opposite sex the respect due to rational beings. It was there only she beheld intelligence and cultivation exalted above

the trivial distinctions of society.

She was not, however, blind in her partiality. Vanity, ambition, and egotism, existed as much among the partizans of the Imperial as of the Royal crown of France; the same hankering after an inch of ribbon, or an ell of emblazoned parchment. The worshippers of the god Fo were nearly as idolatrous as

those of the god Fum.

But the ermined skirts of the new aristocracy were still radiant with the glories by which they had been ennobled. The laurel crowns to which she rendered homage, encircled the very brows they had been woven to illustrate. The honour and glory were immediate and identical; not legendary, not tradi-tional, not to be taken upon trust. The waters were fresh from the sacred fountain; not drivelled through centuries of drought and stagnation. The swords were scarcely sheathed which had carved those records of fame; not rusted through ages of inglorious aloth. At the Tuileries, her respect was demanded for dukes and field-marshals, because their ancestors had fought with Bayard, or legislated with Sully. At the house of Admiral Guerchant, her respect was conceded to dukes and field-marshals, by whom kingdoms had been conquered or pacificated; and England itself condemned to burn its midnight oil in privycouncils or debates.

The greatest charm, however, of the admiral's fireside, was its unpretending family affection. The sacred charities of domestic life were fostered both by the precept and example of Napoleon; and immorality, driven discountenanced from his court, had only lately found time to uplift her head from the mire. Matilda delighted in the simple old peasant-mother of the admiral, reversing the laws of nature, and venerating her excellent son. Nor was the unaffected admiration of the young Englishwoman unappreciated in its turn. Elsewhere, Lady Norman commanded homage. At the Hotel of the Place Royale, she obtained personal regard.

What a change in all these varied scenes and societies from the obscurity of Selwood! Matilda had not courage to relate the history of her enjoyments to Sophy Ravenscroft; lest her letters should render her young friend discontented with her monotonous seclusion. She admitted only that she was supremely happy; without stating how much of her felicity was owing to the altered demeanour of Sir Richard; or how much to the absence of the Abbé O'Donnell, who had suddenly departed from Rome. She did not even attempt to excite the interest of Sophia by describing the looks of compassion she had detected in the wist-

ful eyes of the old man, when he bade her adieu.

CHAPTER VIII.

Now hoist the sail and let the streamers float Upon the wanton breezes. Strew the deck With lavender, and sprinkle liquid sweets, That no rude savour maritime invade The nose of nice nobility! Breathe soft, Ye clarionets, and softer still, ye flutes! That winds and waters, lulled by magic sounds, May bear us smoothly to the Gallic shore.

COWPER.

THE carnival had commenced. Paris was undergoing one of those fever-fits of excitement which render the Parisians such ready tools for a revolution, such ready fools for a masked ball. The courtiers of the Tuileries laid aside for a time their vainglory; the partisans of the ex-emperor forgot for a moment their despondency. Every night had its ball or fête, and English dukes, foreign ambassadors, Russian princes, Turkish envoys, vied with each other in the splendour of their entertainments. Lady Dawlish and Lady Arthur promenaded listlessly through the brilliant throng, Mrs. Lockwood lived in a perpetual course of cosmetics, while Madame de Montrond, who fancied that momentous reports for the king's cabinet were to be gathered in those temples of echo where English lords and magnificos of Muscovy lounged together over their sorbets, paraded her diamond tiara from ball-room to ball-room, glittering over the emptiest head that ever aspired to diplomatic renown.

Flattered by the social triumphs of a wife to whom such triumphs were indifferent, Sir Richard Norman took care that the splendours of Matilda's appearance at the court fêtes, should not be eclipsed by those of the most gorgeous of her country-women. But except when they repaired together to these scenes of diversion, the Normans saw little of each other.

His mornings were devoted to researches among the public archives and manuscripts of the royal library, for important documents which he wished to recover, connected with the interests of his family and church; while hers were trifled away amidst the intrusions and encroachments of her fashion-

able friends.

Escaping one day from her crowded saloon, Lady Norman directed her coachman to drive to the Place Royale. Her evening engagements had latterly detained her from the Guerchants' pleasant circle; and she wished to prove to her kind friends that she was not forgetful as well as negligent. To her surprise, an air of unusual gaiety seemed to animate the dreary old Hotel. The admiral and his lady seemed inspirited by some unavowed good fortune. Matilda sympathized with their cheerfulness without troubling herself to divine the cause; and was gratified when the admiral, on leading her back to her carriage, thanked her, with cordial courtesy, for having remembered her obscure friends among the engagements of so gay a season.

"A time may come," said he, as he pressed her hand at parting, "when my devoted services will prove how highly we esteem the friend of our English captain's widow, for his sake,

and how truly we love her for her own."

There was something unaccountable to Lady Norman, something almost affecting, in this effusion of sentiment on the part of the rough old commander; and she leant back in a corner of her carriage, as it wound rapidly along the crowded Boulevards, revolving the origin and object of the admiral's apostrophe.—When, lo! just at the junction of the Rue Cerutti, a sudden crash startled her from her reverie; and she found herself in contact with a plain dark chariot, in which, the blinds being partially drawn down, she was enabled by her reclining position to discern the person of her husband.

How slight the incident, yet how mysterious! Sir Richard,—like most men of his age, an abhorrer of closed carriages,—driving in a stuffy chariot along the Boulevards, at a moment when he had announced himself as pledged to attend an in-

teresting debate in the Chambre des Députés.

To catch a second glimpse and place her suspicions beyond a doubt, was out of the question. Much as she longed to ascertain whether the companion with whom he was engaged in eager discourse, were male or female, it was impossible. The chariot had the start of her by fifty yards, and, though her heart was bursting with impatience, she thought it beneath her dignity to issue orders to quicken their pace. The servants had, perhaps, been as quicksighted as herself in detecting their master.

Resolved, however, to keep the mysterious chariot as long as possible in view, and perceiving that it was proceeding towards the Place Louis XV., she desired the coachman to drive to the Champs Elysées; where, as she was in the frequent habit of alighting for a quiet walk, her presence would excite no surprise.

Poor Matilda's project was successful. So far as the Avenue de Neuilly, she kept the carriage in sight; nothing doubting that it would pursue the road to the Bois de Boulogne; when, just as they reached the turning towards Chaillot, her carriage stopped suddenly, and the ever-smiling face of Lady Dawlish's coxeombical son, Colonel Noel, presented itself at the open window.

"Good morning, Lady Norman," said he. "Seen my mother to-day?—Hope you are not going to the Bois—eh?—Just come from riding there with the Lockwoods. An east wind that cuts

like a carving-knife!"

Lady Norman was so much in the habit of stopping her carriage in the Bois de Boulogne or its confines, to refresh herself by a short walk, that her footman accepted the arrival of his lady's handsome fellow-countryman as a signal to open the door; on which the Colonel gave his horse to his groom, and prepared himself to escort her.

Lady Norman's thoughts were too deeply pre-engrossed to take much heed of him. But ere they had proceeded a hundred paces, her progress was impeded by a child, a fine little boy, with whom she had come in contact as he was sporting along

the causeway.

"Poor little fellow!—I trust he is not hurt!" cried she, lifting him up, before the bonne, who was at some distance, could approach them. "Tu ne t'es pas blessé, n'est ce pas, mon petit chéri?" she continued, attempting to embrace the child.

"Put me down, don't kiss me. Don't talk French to me, I am English!" cried the sturdy little fellow. And Matilda, perceiving that his lip was cut by his fall, could not but admire his spirit and energy, and envy the mother of so promising

"Noble boy, 'pon honour!" exclaimed Colonel Noel, surveying him through his glass. "I present you with my cravache, my little man, as a reward for your heroism."

"I don't want your whip," retorted the child. "Mamma

says I am not to accept presents from strangers."
"And what is your name?" inquired Matilda, perceiving that the nurse, who had now rejoined them, was a foreigner.

"My name is Norman."

"A namesake of your ladyship? A monopolizer of excellences!" said Noel, with an ineffable smile; and as he stooped to bestow a condescending caress upon the boy Lady Norman suddenly found her husband by her side. Confused by such a startling succession of incidents, she coloured deeply. Nor was her distress diminished on noticing the indignant expression of his countenance.

"How are you, Norman?" demanded the graceful Colonel, unobservant of their embarrassment. "Just run down a little namesake of yours, whose beauty does honour to the family.

"A namesake of mine?" inquired Sir Richard, regarding the noble child with a degree of admiration that for a moment overmastered his displeasure at finding Matilda tête-à-tête with

the gallant Colonel.
"Will you kiss this gentleman?" demanded Lady Norman

of the child.

"No! I don't like him. Let me go to my nurse. Hallo!" cried the child, interrupting himself, as he caught sight of Lady Norman's equipage, drawn up beside the path—" Manette! They have sent a carriage for us."

"It is not your carriage, sir. Run on, and do not trouble the lady," replied the attendant, in her native language.

"I tell you it is mine, or papa's," persisted the boy. "Whatever you see, marked with those two pictures, a golden star, and a soldier's hand with a battleaxe, belongs to us. Mamma told me so the other day. This is our carriage, and I choose to get into it; I am tired.

And who is your mamma?" inquired Colonel Noel.

"What is that to you?" demanded the arrogant little peachick, so early trained in the vainglorious paths of heraldry. And his attendant was forced to explain, with many apologies, that he was the son and heir of Lady Catherine Norman.

Both Sir Richard and his wife, painfully startled by the discovery, made no further attempt to detain their young

"It is too cold to walk!" said he, turning towards the carriage; and having hastily handed in his wife, he followed, leaving to the gallant colonel no alternative but to remount his horse, and ride off.

For some minutes silence prevailed between the parties. But as they re-traversed the Boulevards to return home, Matilda could not refrain from remarking-"I fancied I met you here, an hour ago, in a chariot with the blinds half drawn?

But Sir Richard was apparently too much engrossed by his

own thoughts to hear or heed her observation. "How on earth came you to enter into conversation with that child?" was the first observation that escaped his lips.

"He met with an accident through my heedlessness, and was too brave to complain. I never saw a finer little

fellow.

"Confound him!" muttered Sir Richard, with a degree of bitterness such as he had not betrayed since his departure from Selwood Manor. "No doubt that prying woman of a nurse will go home and tell the Normans that we have been crossquestioning the child. A fine triumph for them, and a pretty history they will make of it!—and that puppy Noel, too, standing by, pretending not to know the child;—his own cousin, and dining constantly, as he does, with the parents."

"Rely upon it, Colonel Noel knows and cares nothing about Mr. Norman's prospect of succeeding to your estate," said Matilda, by way of consolation. "I dare say he thinks we have a nursery full of children of our own: or, more probably still,

thinks nothing about the matter."

"I am not ass enough to imagine, as you would insinuate, that the whole world is interested in my family affairs!" cried the irritated Sir Richard. "But that Giles Norman does make the heirship presumptive of his son to my estate a subject of vaunt, I have good reason to know. Giles Norman is a vulgar-minded dog, inflated with notions of his family consequence; and I entertain no doubt that Noel is at this moment enjoying a laugh with him over our mortification."

"Colonel Noel would be shooked at the idea of enjoying so barbarous a thing as a laugh," said Lady Norman, unwilling to see her husband's vexation in a serious light. "I dare say he has returned to escort Mrs. Lockwood through the Bois,

without troubling himself further about us."

But her husband would not be appeased. All that evening, he resembled the Sir Richard Norman of Selwood Manor, far more than the Sir Richard Norman of the Pavillon Marson, or

Salle des Maréchaux.

But his self-love had deeper mortifications in store. On his arrival in Paris, he had been elated, more elated, perhaps, than became his honourable descent, by the distinctions accorded him by the royal family, and the ecclesiastical dignitaries of Paris. And lo! the very next time he had the honour of an invitation from the cardinal archbishop, he found, on entering the dreary apartments of the palace, that Mr. Norman was also among the guests.

To enter into the pitiful detail of their family differences to his eminence, was impossible. A Judas-like bow was accordingly exchanged between the cousins; and the august prelate took occasion, in the course of the evening, to express to Sir Richard his satisfaction in having made the acquaintance of so distinguished a member of the Norman family, and the Catholic church, as his cousin Giles.

Next night, Matilda and her husband were included in one of those select parties at the Château which, as they comprehended twenty foreigners to a single Frenchman, were already beginning to make the restored family unpopular with their own party: the king being perpetually surrounded with English, Russ, or Prussian uniforms; the Duchesse d'Angou-leme with London exclusives. Lady Norman, after the usual compliments of reception, found herself suddenly congratulated by the dauphinless duchess, upon the extreme beauty of her children; who had attracted the notice of his majesty some weeks before, while playing in the park of St. Cloud; and, painful as it was to explain in presence of the silent circle, and still more in presence of Sir Richard, the real state of the case, Matilda faltered with a blush that "she was not so fortunate as to be a mother; and that the children to whom her royal highness alluded, were those of a distant relative."

Ah! you have relatives, then, in Paris?" said the duchess. grieved to have inflicted pain on such a subject. "You must do me the favour to make them known to me, then, on the

earliest opportunity.

Fortunately, Madame de Montrond was at hand to explain. with the eternal smile and universal knowledge of a lady in waiting, that Lady Catherine Norman had already been pre-sented by Lady Dawlish, both to her royal highness and his

"In that case," replied madame, addressing the embarrassed Matilda, "I trust you will always appear here accompanied by your amiable relative."

CHAPTER IX.

Son superbe dégoût, Ses fiers dédains, fuyaient et blamaient tout ;— On l'appelait la belle impertinente. Or, admirez la faiblesse des gens! Plus elle était distraite, exigeante, Plus ils tâchaient par des soins complaisans D'apprivoiser son humeur méprisante.

VOLTAIRE.

THE timidity of character arising from inexperience of the world being hourly increased by the morbid sensitiveness of her husband, Matilda fancied that Lady Catherine Norman would be as much annoyed as herself by the awkward position in

which they were placed by these misunderstandings.

But it would have required some wholly unprecedented event to disturb the self-possession of the confident Lady Catherine. Everything she said or did was hard, or hardened. She rode hard, she looked hard. Her handsome person and aquiline nose seemed to afford her a privilege of hardihood beyond the charter of her sex. Instead of being embarrassed, she was amused at being thus brought into contact with the Normans of Selwood Manor. Her husband's heirship to their title and estate had been one of his chief recommendations to her favour; and she prepared herself to look down and talk down her pre-

sumptuous rival, whenever they should be thrown together.

Her ladyship's parents, the Earl and Countess of Roscrea,
were Tory grandees of the first class; bigots in religion, politics, and the ethics of social life. Accustomed to hear the law laid down from the petty throne of her mother's drawing-room till she fancied herself entitled to lay it down in her turn, Lady Catherine had assumed the right to pronounce upon administrations and hierarchies, as audaciously as if any syllable she uttered were deserving the attention of any reasonable being.

Her presumption, however, backed by connections equally presumptuous and lofty, imposed upon the many. The wellbred bowed assent to her verbose harangues; the patient bore with her absolutism; the timid shrunk from her impertinence; till by degrees she came to fancy herself oracular. To repay her concession in allying herself with an anathematized Papist, she had exacted the retirement of Giles Norman from commercial pursuits; and their prospects in life thus destroyed, they had been living, ever since their marriage, on the allow-ance made him by his father and the interest of her ladyship's ladyship-like fortune; an income that exactly sufficed to defray their dress, equipage, and opera-box, leaving the necessaries of life to chance and post-obits. Nevertheless, as they made an excellent appearance in the world, and the world was delighted to enter them on its list of friends, they formed a brilliant variety in the insect tribes volant in London; and became

exclusive among the exclusives.

Inexplicable is the force of certain filmy bonds which society has been pleased to enweave for its own enthralment! The silly bird is not more easily charmed in an imaginary circle, than English society by any gibberish which impostors of a certain standing are bold enough to pronounce. Lady Catherine Norman belonged in London to what was termed "Lady Dawlish's set;" and there was nothing indecorous, vulgar, or unfeeling, which "Lady Dawlish's set" had not privileged itself to do with impunity. Having decreed themselves infallible, society submitted to the decree. It was useless for people of higher rank, fortune, sense, accomplishments, or beauty, to say, "I am not one of them, but I am something more!" The knowing ones had surrounded their lists with impregnable barriers, against which the excluded were constantly pressed forward, and from which they were constantly driven back.

The triflers thus self-erected into a tribunal, naturally imagined that the power so absolute in that favoured spot of earth whose dust is weighed by golden pennyweights, and whose area measured by a twelve-inch ivory rule, must maintain universal authority; and Lady Catherine arrived in Paris, believing that her sneers were to tarnish the renown of statesmen, and her averted glances to drive some unoffending woman from society, as in supercilious, superficial, hyperfashionable London! At the first wave of her wand, she dis-

covered that its virtue was departed!

On giving utterance to one of her incoherent political rhapsodies, oracular in Grosvenor-square, she was entreated by the intelligent French auditors to whom it purported to dictate, to condescend to explain the meaning of her words. And when she asserted, to a lofty coterie in the Faubourg Germain, that Lady Norman was "a person not in society—a person whom nobody knew," she was answered with genuine simplicity that "the Lady Norman she stated to be her distant connection, might not be in society; but that their Lady Norman was the most charming of women, received at the Château, and honoured with the favour of Madame."

To throw a chill over this misplaced enthusiasm, Lady Catherine surveyed the offenders over her lofty nose, as though its shade were to regulate the world, like the gnomon of a sundial. But it would not do. Instead of being transfixed to stone, they whispered among themselves that the tall miladi was very gauche and a leetle deaf; and turned round to

welcome Matilda, who came among them gentle and unpre-

tending; talking in a strain they could understand.

This failure was wormwood to Lady Catherine. Her sting was extracted,—her arrows rendered pointless. She commanded no sympathy, unless from her husband; who had fancied that, in allying himself with a ladyship, he should astonish the world as much as he had astonished himself. He was indignant to find that he could no longer maintain his importance in society by leaning against the wall with a fastidious countenance, holding his tongue, hat, and cane; too well-dressed to walk, too well-informed to talk, on any ordinary occasion. The empty airs by which the slavish world of London had been astounded, passed altogether unnoticed in Paris; and he was required to show cause why he was to be attended to.

It was only through the beauty of his son, therefore, that he still contrived to inflict a pang upon his kinsman. At the children's balls forming one of the numerous outlets of the vanity and luxury of the season, young Norman, with his clustering curls and suit of crimson velvet and point, was the object of universal admiration; while Matilda was sure to come in for her share of compliments on the loveliness of her supposed offspring. Lady Catherine had been so careful to spread the report that the boy was heir to Sir Richard Norman of Selwood Manor, that it was but natural strangers should conclude

the child to be his son. So often had this vexatious mistake occurred, that when one night on entering the carriage, after being singled out before fifty English people by the Duc de Berri with flatteries on the gallant appearance made in the Bois de Boulogne by young Norman and his Shetland pony, Sir Richard burst forth into exclamations against the mortification of his childless bed, Matilda felt him to be almost justified. Hitherto, he had bewailed only the misfortune of having his estate inherited by the hateful Normans. He now spoke of children as the fairest ornaments of existence; the cheerers of a household, the embellishment of home, the best resource against old age.

"Then why, since Providence denies us a child of our own," id Matilda, "why not adopt one? Next to one's own offsaid Matilda, spring, a child adopted from infancy must be the dearest thing

on earth.

"Are you serious?" demanded Sir Richard, startled by this sudden proposal.

"Perfectly serious. Nothing would more conduce to my

happiness."
"You pledge me your word that you would adopt and educate as your own, some child whom we might mutually select for the purpose?

"Without hesitation. But it is from yourself that the pledge

ought rather to be demanded; since it is you who must incur the expense and responsibility of the adoption."

"Such has long been the dearest wish of my heart!" ex-

claimed Sir Richard.

"Then why keep it secret from me?" cried Matilda. "Oh that you had been more explicit! How many uneasy moments might have been spared us! The company of a darling little child would have so enlivened our dull fireside!"

"It may do so still. We have, I trust, Matilda, years of happiness in store. We have, perhaps, hit upon the only expe-

dient likely to confirm their perfect enjoyment."

On parting for the night, her husband embraced her with a warmth of tenderness such as, for many months, had ceased to soften his demeanour towards her; and on the morrow, met her again at breakfast in the highest spirits. A new life seemed dawning to his expectations. Joy sparkled in his eyes, and flurried his manner. Never had Matilda beheld him so elated. He proposed a ride; he proposed a walk. They dined tête-à-tête; and all that evening he remained a fixture, and a most welcome one, in Lady Norman's opera-box. Full of chat, gallantry, and animation, he seemed desirous to thank her,

every moment, for her concession to his wishes.

For many succeeding days, Matilda was supremely happy. How different the effect produced upon her feelings by the vague adulation of the coteries of Paris, compared with the soothing kindness of her husband! Instead of passing three-fourths of the day away from her, Sir Richard was now scarcely ever absent from home; and when he chose, who could be such an agreeable companion as Sir Richard Norman? Even when she drove out, he managed to accompany her, by proposing an expedition to the bric a brace warehouses of the Quai Voltaire, where, at that time, the most valuable antiquities, the spoil of military booty in all the countries of Europe, were heaped togenther almost without consideration. He chose to have her opinion in the choice of a fine suite of bronze candelabra, which he was selecting for the hall at Selwood; and insisted upon presenting her with an exquisite panelling of Florentine mosaic, for her favourite boudoir. The adornment and restoration of the Manor-House seemed to be his chief object.

"Your husband seems to consider that the prospects of the great question are brightening in England," observed Madame de Montrond. "This will be charming news for the

kino!'

"It is long since I heard Sir Richard allude to the subject," said Lady Norman. "Since the Abbé's departure, he has

interested himself little in politics.

"But unless the Emancipation question were safe, would he indulge in all this expense for the enrichment of his estates?" "Indeed, I think he would. My husband is wholly indif-

ferent to politics, foreign or domestic."

"No man in his right senses can be indifferent to politics," replied Madame de Montrond. "Politics involve our whole existence,-influence the very air we breathe,-our eating, drinking, sleeping, loving, hating, nay, the universal tenour of

"Sir Richard's life, believe me, runs smoothly on, without a thought about the matter," persisted Matilda, with a

smile.

"My dear madam, I happen to know that he is intimately connected with personages of importance attached to the cause of the Usurper," whispered Madame de Montrond.

"With Admiral Guerchant, I admit. But our intimacy has

no political tendency."

We do not trouble ourselves about the admiral. An honest man; but a ganache, of whom we entertain no apprehension," cried the lady of the bedchamber.

"So much the better, for he is the only Bonapartist with whom we are acquainted," replied her companion, firmly.

"Your ladyship must excuse me; I alluded simply to Sir Richard Norman.

"We frequent the same society."

" No woman moves in precisely the same circles as her husband. There must always be intimacies in which she cannot participate."

"These, in Sir Richard's case, lie entirely among his own countrymen. I often meet him riding with strangers. But

they are Englishmen.

Englishmen?"—retorted Madame de Montrond. And the silence with which that emphatic concluding syllable was received by Matilda, convinced her that the seeming artlessness of Lady Norman was only a piece of acting more consummate than her own.

Nevertheless, when the cabinet-councilress of the Bourbon court departed, leaving her to her meditations, Matilda could not but recall to mind the significant tone in which she had pro-nounced the word 'intimacies.' The peculiar smile of Madame de Montrond convinced her that Sir Richard had connections of a nature not to be revealed to his wife; while her own experience assured her that they included a chocolate-coloured chariot, and a figure enwrapt in a cloak lined with the richest sables. Her previous uneasiness on the subject returned. Her heart sank within her when she reflected how unstable is the happiness based upon the sandy foundations of man's fidelity!

The recent change in Sir Richard's deportment towards herself. induced her to hope that either her fears outstripped the truth, or that the indiscretions he might have been entangled in were giving way before the sacred influence of legitimate love. She determined not to discourage, by petulance, the returning steps of the wanderer. It would be her own fault were she to disturb, by jealous resentments, the happy footing to

which they were almost restored.

Since the night on which the project of adoption had been discussed between them, Sir Richard had reverted to it no more. But the solemn manner in which, on that occasion, he exhorted her to secresy, even with her nearest friends, convinced her that he was not likely to abandon a scheme which he regarded so seriously. Alive to the delicacy of the subject as regarded herself, he was perhaps unwilling to pain her by allusions to it, until his plans were matured. Acoustomed to make his will her law, she determined to wait in silence till it was his pleasure to take her into his confidence.

Meanwhile, their domestic tranquillity remained unimpaired, even by the insinuations of Madame de Montrond. Sir Richard was her constant companion; and it was evidently his desire to withdraw Matilda as much as possible from the brilliant vortex in which she was engaged. He was always suggesting excuses to detain her at home; nay, she sometimes fancied him annoyed at the homage with which she was beset by the fan-

tastical Colonel Noel.

The national habits of Paris were at that period disorganized by the strange innovations introduced by the wealthy and insolent of all nations; who, following in the van of the conquering army, had taken up their abode in its princely hotels, scattering their barbaric gold, and introducing customs which were those neither of their own country nor of the country submitted to their usurpation.

One of the whims of the fashionable English was, to arrange dinner parties at the more eminent restaurants. They chose to assume that the salons of the Frères Provençaux, and the Rocher, Very, and Bouvilliers, were the resort of good company; and thus created a custom which they fancied to be that

of the country.

"Lady Dawlish wants us to dine with her to-morrow, at the Rocher de Cancale," said Matilda, one morning, to her husband. "Colonel Noel will call in an hour for our answer."

"I detest those vulgar dinners," cried Norman. "One has to play audience all the time to Noel's and Amboise's criticisms on the new entrées. Pray make some excuse."

"But since, in compliment to us, Lady Dawlish declined

including Lady Catherine and Mr. Norman in her party?"
"What then — Noel prefers your company to that of the impertinent Patagonian. But Lady Dawlish had better stick to the Normans. They belong to her own school. For the love of mercy, dear Matilda, let me not see you enrolled among the exclusives, and do not dine at the Rocher."

The next sacrifice requested of her was to relinquish Lady

Dawlish's Thursday's soirées; where, though nothing whatever was provided for the diversion of the guests, the surface of the society was so smooth and brilliant, that people quitted the

house fancying they had been amused

Even the livelier thes dansants of Lady Arthur were soon tacitly interdicted; for Matilda, who had emerged into the brilliancies of the world solely in accordance with the caprice of her husband, was easily persuaded to retire anew to the domestic seclusion in which he chose to discover new sources of

enjoyment.

By degrees, Sir Richard's purpose was accomplished. His wife withdrew from general society. She wearied out the assiduous solicitations of Colonel Noel; and avoided all public amusements, unless when enabled to enjoy them tête-à-tête with her husband. At the opera, at Feydeau, at the Théatre Français, the Normans sometimes appeared together. But they were no longer seen apart.

CHAPTER X.

Be well advis'd,—tell o'er thy tale again! It cannot be—thou dost but say 'tis so. I trust I may not trust thee; for thy breath Is but the vain breath of a mortal man. Thou shalt be punished for thus frighting me. Then speak again!

SHAKSPEARE.

However candid the disposition of Matilda, her intercourse with her family had long been tinged with reserve, by her desire to withhold from the resentment of her father and the exulting comments of Tom Cruttenden the secret of her domestic anxieties; while her letters, both to her sister and the Ravenscrofts, glanced as lightly as possible over her recent brilliant introduction to society, which could not be detailed without involving the admission of her personal triumphs.

"Ay, ay, poor soul!" cried Cruttenden, when Elizabeth read aloud to the fireside circle the joyous letters in which her sister described her cheerful home. "I knew that account we read in out mere newspaper fudge. Sir Bluebeard mews her up in Paris, you see, just as he did at his old rat-hole of a country seat!"

"What motive could the London papers have for inventing their statement that Lady Norman has been one of the most brilliant ornaments of the court of the Tuileries throughout the

winter?" remonstrated Elizabeth.

"As if the penny-a-liners wanted a metive for their fabrications! As if your sister would seem so proud of spending her evenings at home with her curmudgeon of a husband, if she'd the privilege of flaunting away in tiffany and beads at their make-believe French court! However, there's one comfort, the English ninnies won't be able to flaunt there long. The French can't abide King Log now they've got him; and, take my word for it, they'll soon have their peppery little artillery captain back among 'em again, and then, my service to British tourists. The devil or Nap will take the hindmost!"

"Matilda's letters do not allude to any such apprehension."

"Matilda's letters allude to just such polite-conversation nonsenses as young ladies love to write about. But the price of stocks alludes to it, Miss Betsy; and I take the price of stocks to speak more to the purpose than all the clap-trap speechifiers in parliament. You may tell Matty from me, in your next epistle, that if she don't look sharp and persuade Sir Richard to make the best of his way home before the rain falls in earnest, they'll be wet to the skin before they can get up their umbrella. Tell her I've private information that Nap will be out of quod before his year's up!"

Elizabeth Maule was too prudent to give more than a hint to her sister of this admonition. But it sufficed to startle Matilda; and she was not backward in confiding her alarms to her

husband.

"Mr. Cruttenden must be an admirable judge of the state of Parisian politics!" replied he, with an incredulous smile. "I have no anxiety. I was at Guerchant's yesterday. The circle was crowded with the most ardent partisans of Napoleon, but not a word of politics. Literature, science, and the drama, exclusively occupied their attention. Could they have been talking so enthusiastically of arts and academies, had their party been on the eve of a great movement?"

Without pretending to the tact of a Madame de Montrond, Matilda thought otherwise; but she did not presume to oppose

her opinion to that of her husband.

"At all events," resumed Sir Richard, "since a doubt has been raised on the subject, it will be better to give up our journey to Italy."

"To Italy?" exclaimed Matilda, who entertained as much idea of a journey to Tobolsk. "Did you intend to go to Italy

this spring?"

"What better can we do with ourselves? We are both tired of Paris; and, on quitting Selwood, I made arrangements for a year's absence."

Matilda was silent. She waited to be told of what else she was

tired, and where else she intended to go.

"Nothing can be more insupportable than Paris during Lent," said he, "particularly to a moderate Catholic like myself, who am tied down, against my conviction, to certain observances. Our best plan would be to engage one of the fine seats near Paris. which are to be let at this season. We should pass a pleasant summer, and be on the spot to observe every variation of the political atmosphere; temporary seclusion being, of course, indispensable to our project.

"Our project?" reiterated Matilda.

"Our project of an adoption," replied Sir Richard, in a lower

"You think, perhaps," said Matilda, "that the little creature would familiarize itself with us more readily, if excluded from the sight of other people?

"Infants familiarize themselves readily enough with any ne," said Norman, carelessly.
"I have been considering," said Lady Norman, "that perhaps we should be prudent in selecting a child of more advanced age: the health and intellect of an infant are so little to be relied on; whereas, at an age more developed, one forms some surmise of future character."

Sir Richard turned upon her with an inquiring look. But the

sweet screnity of Matilda's face reassured him that she intended no sarcasm. "Of course," she pursued, unabashed, "our chief hope of comfort in the child must depend on its disposition. 'Our sole hope depends upon its inheritance of my property,"

answered Norman, firmly.

"Your property?" interrupted the astonished Matilda,

"An object to be secured only by the selection of a young infant, and your temporary seclusion from society, continued he. "The world, and those cursed Normans, will otherwise never believe the child to be our own.

"But you surely do not intend them to believe it?" demanded

Matilda, turning very pale.

"For what other purpose do you suppose me desirous of adopting a child, which may become the plague of our lives? want to become the comptroller of my own fortunes. I want to feel myself master of my own house, the house of my forefathers. Providence has denied us children. Let me, at least, secure myself an heir."
"I fear I did not exactly understand your views, when I

pledged myself the other night to-

"Do you mean," interrupted Sir Richard, turning sharply upon her, "that you wish to retract your promise?"

"I confess it appears to me scarcely justifiable to supersede

by such means the rights of-

"Rights?" exclaimed Norman, again interrupting her. "The law of collateral entail is one of the vilest abuses we derive from feudal times—an abuse which it will be the business of modern enlightenment to reform. In securing my property to an individual of my own selection, I only anticipate by a few years a freedom which the amended laws of the realm will ultimately confer upon every Englishman."

"Still, to impose a stranger on the world as a son of our

own-

"Matilda!" cried Sir Richard, "these scruples should have occurred to you before. Deceived by your apparent concurrence, for the last ten days, I have enjoyed uninterrupted happiness. The blessed hopes of former years have been restored to me, the sweet affection, the calm content. My wishes seemed to be all in-all to you, as in our time of early infatuation. If by your vacillation you defeat my plans, I have only to submit; for your concurrence is essential to their accomplishment; but, in withholding it, you destroy the last illusion of my life—the belief that my welfare is dear to you as your own."

He spoke with so much emotion, that Matilda dared not reply. She knew that he was in the wrong. She knew that the act he meditated was every way reprehensible. She remembered her father's denunciation, that "a falsehood is as a viper, flung back, sooner or later, into the bosom of him who utters it!" and she

trembled, for she saw herself on the verge of crime.

"I have, in fact, already so far committed myself," continued Norman, slightly embarrassed in his turn, "as to announce to several of our friends our expectation of a family, in order to prepare the way for reappearing in the world, a few years hence,

accompanied by our adopted child."

A thousand contending feelings agitated the heart of his wife at this explanation. He had announced that she was likely to be a mother. Never till that moment had she felt humiliated by the mockery of her own position as a childless wife; for the mere sound of that groundless announcement stirred her soul with emotion. He had announced that she was likely to be a mother! It now occurred to her that, within the last week, several of their intimate associates had regarded her with an air of deeper interest, and been more careful and attentive to her movements. But she also recollected the affectionate deference with which she had been treated by her husband; and instead of hailing it as a testimony of rekindling love, was compelled to admit that his attentions to her in public were a scene of dissembling, intended to mislead the opinion of the world. He was deceiving others, as well as inducing her to deceive them. But, alas! it was too late to throw off the mask. She had not courage to defy the world's dread laugh, by admitting that they had plotted an imposture, and lacked energy to carry it into execution.

While thus ruminating on the painful perplexities of her position, the tears rolled silently down her cheeks; and compassionating her distress, Sir Richard, with more sympathy

than she had expected from him, affectionately took her

hand.

"Do not afflict yourself thus, dear Matilda!" said he. "Since you feel irreconcileably averse to the thing, my wishes shall be sacrificed without a murmur. I fancied we understood each other. I fancied we were acting in concert. Since it is not so, do not hesitate to withdraw your concurrence. I own that your concession would have imparted to our middle age that seal of domestic felicity of which offspring are said to be the sole security. By taking the part of a mother towards my adopted heir, I should have fancied you so in earnest, and cherished a proportionate fervour of love and gratitude. But let not this inducement mislead you from what you consider to be your duty. The spotlessness of your conscience, my dearest wife, has a claim superior to the wishes and prayers of your husband; and whatever may be your decision, I will neither reproach you for the false hopes you permitted me to form, nor love you the less for this most bitter disappointment."

The unusual tenderness of his tone and manner drew fresh tears down the cheeks of Matilda. She wanted the moral courage to fulfil what she knew to be her duty. She wanted firmness of mind to control the gentle impulses of her affectionate heart. The delight of imparting happiness to her husband

proved irresistible.

"I have no right to oppose obstacles to your plans," she faltered. "Your judgment ought to decide me, your will to be my law. Whatever course you choose to take in this matter,

shall have my utmost support."

"My dearest Matida!" exclaimed Norman, pressing her hand with rapture, "this compliance renders me the happiest of men. If you could imagine how those detestable Normans have embittered my existence; if you could guess what gloomy thoughts have been passing through my mind. But all my vexations are ended by your amiable self-sacrifice. I am convinced that the true happiness of our life is now beginning. We shall see everything in a different light the moment we invest our prospects in the destinies of a little being who will grow up under our eyes, fashioned by our opinions, and attached by our tenderness."

Though cheered by the elation of her husband, Matilda did not inwardly share his enthusiasm. She could imagine these

ecstasies arising for a child of their own, not for an alien.

"My plan is," resumed Sir Richard (resolved not to let the courage of Matilda cool a second time), "to select an infant at the hospital of the Enfans trouvés, and make it mine by legal adoption. Five or six, sometimes a dozen, wretched babes are daily received there; so that at any moment the choice will be easy. You have, however, been so much seen and admired here, my dearest wife, that several months ought to elapse

before your pretended confinement takes place. This period we must pass in retirement, no matter where. In May, we can return to Paris, and accomplish our scheme.

"But all this cannot be done without taking others into our confidence," said Matilda; her heart sinking before the load of

hypocrisy she was about to assume.

Certainly not. But such things are by no means uncommon. Money will secure me the co-operation of a nurse and physician. who need know nothing of our real name and rank in life.

But our own servants?"

"With the exception of your personal attendant, it will be easy to deceive them. Mrs. Vaux you must contrive to dismiss, and send home."

"That will be very difficult. Vaux is such a faithful attached creature. She has been with me ever since my marriage,

pleaded Lady Norman.

"An excellent plea to propose her retirement, on a pension.

She has some marriage engagement, if I remember?"
"To your head keeper, at Selwood."
"Tell her then that, as we are about to travel, you will require the services of a foreigner. I will pay her expenses home, and secure her an annuity of twenty pounds a year."

" Poor Vaux!" sighed Lady Norman.

"My dear Matilda, she would not, under any circumstances, have remained with you long. And, depend on it, the poor

woman will be enchanted with her change of prospects.'

But even the certainty of becoming Mrs. Chrimes ten years sooner than she had expected, did not reconcile poor Vaux to so sudden a parting from the kind mistress to whom she was attached. Lady Norman's sweetness of character was eminently displayed in consideration for her servants and dependants. And though the waiting-maid was too well acquainted with the arbitrary temper of Sir Richard to hazard opposition to a decree emanating from her master, she departed with secret indignation rankling in her heart, that she should have been superseded by a "vile, artful, designing, intriguing, Italian," in whose service to my lady, Mrs. Vaux predicted to all at Selwood, no good was intended.

Matilda's task of deceit was now beginning in earnest. Sir

Richard required her to make to her family and friends the announcement which he undertook to circulate among her Parisian acquaintances; and though Matilda found it easy to loiter at home in a morning wrapper, with Norman for her constant companion, and an endless supply of new books, music, and works for her recreation, she recoiled from the office of deliberately inditing a falsehood to the Ravenscrofts and her

father.

Nevertheless, it must be done. Sir Richard assured her that the step was indispensable: and at the close of one of her lively

letters to Sophy, she accordingly added, "I look forward with delight to my return next autumn to dear Selwood. And do not be surprised if I bring you a little stranger, to claim a share of the fondness which you have often told me you feel for the infant species, before they grow old enough to be troublesome."

By this equivocation, Matilda hoped to satisfy her conscience: yet when the implied untruth was written, she closed her letter with a burning blush, without hazarding a reperusal. "Look

on't again, she dare not!"

Towards her father, the task of dissimulation was still more difficult. By Mr. Maule's desire, she corresponded with him from time to time; but her sister Elizabeth was the person charged with answering Lady Norman's letters. Now Elizabeth was almost as straightforward and downright as her father. With the delicacy and warmth of feeling becoming her age and sex, she united a degree of high moral principle, which her seclusion from the ways of the world had maintained without speck or blemish. To her honest-hearted, plain-worded family, therefore, Matilda felt that even the whitest of lies was far more difficult to insinuate, than it would have been to bestow the blackest upon a Lady Dawlish or a Lady Arthur D-

The hint which was to convey the intelligence of her prospects of a family, was however at length written and despatched: and Matilda's spirit sank rebuked when the answer arrived, not in the handwriting of Miss Maule, but of her exulting father. The old man's elation knew no bounds. The prospect of being grandfather to a young baronet of large estate, was a vision of glory he had long relinquished; and his delight appeared to his daughter almost puerile. She no longer thought it childish, however, when she reached the close of the epistle, and perused the solemn prayer and benediction bestowed upon herself and her expected child. He told her that he and his would intercede with heaven in her behalf in her hour of peril; and Matilda's lips grew white with terror at the idea of the imposition she was presuming to practise in the sight of heaven, upon the father who so honoured its commandments, and whom its commandments enjoined her to honour.

She was recalled to herself by a postscript in Tom Cruttenden's handwriting. After divers jocular comments on her laziness in wasting twelve years on a performance which reasonable women complete within one, he informed her that if she chose to return to England, and have the little stranger born as became the son of English parents, on English ground, he would endow it, if a boy, with a godfather's token of ten thousand pounds. But, alas! though Matilda knew that it would be a boy, she felt pleased that the necessity for perpetrating her fraud in France, would secure her from imposing upon the generosity of the

eccentric friend of her childhood.

CHAPTER XI.

It is one thing to know the rate and dignity of things; and another to know the little nicks and springs of action .- SENECA.

Towards the close of February, the Normans took possession of the fine old Chateau of St. Sylvain, a short distance from the archiepiscopal palace of Conflans, on the banks of the Seine.

"Noel and his set will ride down to see us here," said Sir Richard, "and Lady Dawlish and Lady Arthur visit you, and report you on their return to be on the sick-list. A loungingchair and wrapping-dress will suffice."

"Would that it were all over!" replied Matilda, with a sigh. "The caresses of a dear little creature brought up to love me as its mother, may reconcile me to this duplicity. But the pre-

liminaries are odious."

Apprehensive that her patience might fail in the tediousness of the trial, Sir Richard now rarely quitted her side, and every day brought down from Paris some costly trinket or interesting work for her amusement.

One morning, about a week after their instalment. Sir Richard, having ridden into Paris to execute some trifling commission for his wife, a barouche, containing Lady Arthur and Lady Dawlish, drove into the courtyard; and Lady Norman's hospitalities were claimed for the day.

"We know you must be bored to death here," cried Lady Arthur, "and intend to spend the day with you." And though a bright March sun was glittering upon gay parterres, bright with hyacinths, tulips, and anemones, the two fine ladies would not be enticed out, but drew towards the fire to enjoy a long day's chat with the pretended invalid.

How on earth do you get rid of yourself in this impossible place?" cried the affected Lady Arthur, looking round with an air of compassion; "but, of course, you intend to return to Paris for your confinement?"

" I-I-hardly know-

"Not know, and next month so near? Quite a heroine, I protest!" said Lady Dawlish, with a sneering smile. "I suppose your Bonapartean friends have persuaded you to have Evrat, Dubois, or some other creature belonging to the household of Josephine or Marie Louise?"

"I really cannot say . . . I—leave such matters to the hoice of Sir Richard."

"Of Sir Richard?" ejaculated Lady Dawlish, "and with

all your pattern propriety and delicacy of feeling? Surely you had better consult Madame de Montrond as to whom would be appointed for such an office, were Madame to delight us with an heir to the throne?"

"I cannot fancy those who are so recently returned from emigration, better skilled than ourselves to pronounce upon the professional eminence of Paris," replied Matilda, as calmly as

she could.

"People in a certain station of life are informed of every-thing," persisted Lady Dawlish. "Nothing, for instance,

escapes the knowledge of the Château."

"Nevertheless," remonstrated Lady Arthur, "I was the first to mention last night to Madame de Montrond the report generally prevalent of Napoleon's escape from Elba. He promised, you know, to be back in Paris with the violets."

"The violets are here already," said Matilda, pointing to a vase of fresh-gathered Parma violets, standing near her sofa.

"And the petit Caporal, they say, is not far distant," added

Lady Arthur.
"Absurd!" retorted Lady Dawlish. "As if people permitted to enjoy once more the decencies of legitimate monarchy, would again tolerate the tyranny of an upstart!"

"Madame de Montrond did not seem to think it by any

means absurd."

"Why, what did she say on the subject?"

"Nothing! or she would have taken her course of lessons from Talleyrand to very little purpose. But she dismissed her whisperers an hour earlier than usual, and soudded off along the galleries towards the back stairs."
"To alarm the king?"

"As if anything short of the probability of a national famine could rouse him up! When Napoleon is within an hour's march of Paris, the king will perhaps think of packing up the royal saucepans.'

"How can you condescend to retail the vulgar jests of the newspapers?" said Lady Dawlish, yawning. "Napoleon is as likely to be within a day's march of Paris, as you and I a day's

journey of Pekin !-- '

"Time will show," replied Lady Arthur, while Matilda trembled as she listened. The return of Napoleon must necessitate the flight of the English from Paris; and in her own country, how painful, how impossible, to persevere in the imposture to which she had been pledged by her husband! To her ears, the reports so vaguely cited by Lady Arthur D. were of terrible import; and as the day were away, the necessity of entertaining her two languid guests while her thoughts were thus grievously pre-engrossed, wore down her spirits. Never had she so eagerly longed for the return of Sir Richard; and when the dusk drew on, she dreaded lest lights should be brought and reveal to her companions the changes of her countenance.

The sounding of the hall bell at length announced the return of her husband; and starting from her sofa, regardless of the presence of her visitors, she rushed to the door to receive him, and gather from his lips the tidings so momentous to her happiness. But, lo! the hand she seized, in addressing the tall figure she imagined to be that of Norman, responded to her grasp by a cordial hearty shake; while an unfamiliar voice saluted her with—"Here's a surprise, Matty! Who'd have thought of us two meeting among the parleyvoos! But I

warrant I'm grown out of your recollection?

The candles at that moment borne in before Sir Richard Norman, which revealed to him the inopportune presence of Matilda's fashionable visitors, displayed to Matilda the gaunt figure of an uncouth young man, whom she had little difficulty in recognizing as her brother, Cruttenden Maule; and while her husband hastened to offer a hollow welcome to her two friends, Lady Norman was grieved to feel that her own reception of her brother was scarcely more sincere. Her conscience reproved her that she regarded in the light of a serious evil this interview with one of her nearest kindred. But "Master Crutt.," the spoiled child of the whimsical old torment of her youth, was too self-satisfied a person to take heed of her embarrassment.

"I fancy I have given you a startle, eh! Matty?" cried he, taking a place on the sofa by her side. "Sir Richard tells me you never got Betsy's letter announcing my visit. Well, a pleasure's all the greater for popping on one unawares. I took up my quarters last night at your place in Paris, not knowing you was moved; and, by good luck, Sir Richard looked in to-

day, and gave me a lift down here in his cab."

"It was very kind of you to come so great a distance to see me," said Matilda, faintly, perceiving that the eye-glass of

Lady Dawlish was fixed wonderingly on her brother.

"To see you? Come, that's a good un! As if my father would have spared me from business for ten days, if there hadn't been two birds to kill with one stone. Not so soft as that, I take it! Father keeps as strict a hand on us as ever."

"I never found him otherwise than indulgent," said

Matilda, in a low voice.

"In your time, may be. But folks grow grumphy as they get in years. Old Crutt's always putting it into father's head that I'm wilder than other young fellows of my age; that's old Tom's way of showing kindness, you know. The greater the favourite, the greater his pains to plague one out of one's life."

"And was it Mr. Cruttenden, then, who suggested your journey to Paris?" inquired Matilda, dreading lest a pause in

Sir Richard's conversation with Lady Arthur should expose to their criticism the coarseness of her brother's tone and manner.

"Why, for once, father and he were of a mind! The firm happened to have a great order from a wholesale house in Paris; so they thought I'd better come and have a peep at the securities, before the goods were made up. Brother John, you know, sports fine, and won't have nothing to say to the business. John's going to take orders. (Old Crutt. says his orders will never bring him in the value of ours!) And father's just bought him a fine living in Yorkshire."

And William?"

"Bill's got his head turned t'other way! Bill's all for soldiering; and has persuaded father to lodge money at Greenwood's for the purchase of an ensi'ncy for him. I'm the only one of the family that sticks to the main chance. I never had the least spice of the book-worm in me, like John; or the least taste for sporting copper-lace outside my jacket, like Master Bill. Business is my mark; it comes as natural to me as Burton ale after Cheshire! Tom Crutt. wanted to send me to college with John, when we left Rugby. But I thanked him for nothing, and said I'd as lief go to the treadmill. So I'm to be taken into partnership next year; and when father and old Cruttenden drop, may be I shall buy out Wickset, and have the whole thing to myself. There'll be a go, Matty! 'Cruttenden Maule' will look a plaguy deal more knowing, painted on the waggons, and copper-plated at the head of a folio, than Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset, and Co. No 'Co.' for me! I'll be my own master, or nothing; a man, or a mouse."

"Do you think of remaining long in Paris?"

"Can't justly say, till Sir Richard has stepped up with me

to the Marry, as they call it; where these parleyvooing rascals have their counting-house. There's few of 'em, I find, can speak English, like reasonable beings; and I don't pretend to understand their outlandish lingo. However, when Sir Richard's brought us to a deal, if I find the parties good men as they pretend, the sooner I'm out of their filthy city of holes and corners the better. Old Crutt. said at parting, he'd warrant I wasn't the chap to waste my time and money among lanternjawed pickpockets of Frenchmen. And I mean to prove his words.

Matilda's satisfaction at the assurance was damped by finding that her fastidious friends had been attentive auditors to this ill-timed exposure of her family affairs. Nor could she refrain from grieving that, instead of being able to present to them her mild, intelligent, well-mannered elder brother, she was compelled to see their wonderment excited by the ill-bred familiarity of the adopted darling of Tom Cruttenden. contrast between his unformed, ungainly person, and the flashy style of dress sported by the provincial buck, produced a ludi-

crous effect; and when at dinner, on being offered an entres, he exclaimed in an audible voice, "Oh! hang your messes! Give me a cut of mutton and a potatoe, and I won't trouble your hashes and kickshaws;" Lady Arthur could no longer repress her laughter.

"I trust, Mr. Maule," said she, maliciously singling him out for conversation, "that though you profess not to understand the language of the country, you met with no difficulties on

the road?"

"None in the least, my lady," replied Crutt. with a knowing "Folks must get up early in the morning who manage smirk. to take me in; and I was put up to snuff before I set out. I kept my valeese, as they call it, in my hand, every place we stopped at, and managed to arrive without losing a rag. If it wasn't for the custom-house (where the shameful smuggling of the English quality makes em deuced sharp), I should have had no hindrance to complain of,

"Were there any letters for me in Paris?" inquired Matilda of her husband, having already obtained from him a vague assurance that no political news was stirring confirmative of Lady Arthur's intelligence. "Any visits,—any cards?"

"Guerchant has been several times; and having taken down

our address, intends, I suppose, to pay us a visit,"

"Guerchant? one of the canaille of Bonaparte?" said Lady Dawlish, drawing up.

"Admiral Guerchant, a peer of France and most distinguished man," observed Sir Richard, gravely.

"A peer! You might as well talk of the peerage of a Scotch lord of session," persisted her ladyship, with undisguised con-

"Why, you don't mean, Matty, that you meddle or make with folks that ever belonged to the natural enemy of your country, the worst wretch that ever was sent on earth for the punishment of mankind?" vociferated Cruttenden Maule, speaking rather thick, after his third class of champagne.
"Sir Richard, you know, is liberal in his politics," observed

Matilda, watching him with anxiety.
"Oh, he's liberal, is he?" said her brother, with a boisterous laugh. "Old Crutt. swears there an't a greater joke in nature, than the liberalism of the English quality! 'A liberal lord's much the same as a warm frost!' says Tom. 'Great cry and little wool' among 'em, as the barber said when shearing Solomon's pigs! 'There's our Sir Richard,' says Tom, 'fancies himself a liberal, 'cause by sticking to the Whigs he hopes to carry the Cartholic question. But in everything else, says Tom, 'Sir Richard's as stiff a Tory as Queen Elizabeth. Why it stands to reason, that people in his situation of life must be for the maintenance of all outstanding abuses, pension-lists, and place-givings; 'cause, sooner or later, he may be the better for 'em. As to expecting a baronet with a fine rent-roll to help to pull down hereditary rights, 'tisn't a thing in natur'. Sir Richard's as clear a case of conservative,' says Tom, 'as ever I clant eyes on.'"

I clapt eyes on."

"Bravo, Mr. Maule, bravo!" cried Lady Arthur, greatly entertained by his eloquence. "Thanks for your announcement

of so valuable an addition to our party."

"Your party?" retorted the young orator, indignant at the presumption of a giggling woman with a painted face pretending to political entity. "I suppose your ladyship's party means a tea-party, or card-party? We've smoked out the shepoliticians in our town. Bless you, they went and held a meeting one night at the King's Arms, to petition Parliament, neither they nor any one else understood for what. So we gave 'em a touch of the marrow-bones and cleavers, to bring 'em to their senses."

Cruttenden Maule had the pleasure of enjoying to himself the laugh with which he closed his harangue. No applause fol-

lowed this coarse attack.

"I cannot help fearing," said Matilda, red with shame and vexation, "that Admiral Guerchant's frequent visits to our hotel correlevate the report of Nanoleon's disembarkation."

hotel corroborate the report of Napoleon's disembarkation."

"Napoleon's disembarkation! Nap come back again to be emperor?" cried Cruttenden, aghast at the idea of collision with the man-monster, whom he had been brought up to consider as a being of supernatural power and wickedness. "And to choose the minute of my being over here in Paris! Here's a pretty kettle of fish! But I suppose you're only humming me!"

"Be not uneasy, sir," replied Lady Dawlish, with much solemnity. "Birnam wood may come to Dunsinane; but take my word, Napoleon Bonaparte will never make his appearance

again at the Tuileries."

"The Tuileries think otherwise," said Lady Arthur. "So much so, that Madame de Montrond's panic last night deter-

mined Arthur to secure our passports."

"It would really be extremely provoking, so early in the season," observed Lady Dawlish, peevishly, after a moment's consideration of her own plans. "What could one possibly do with oneself in London, till after Easter? It would not be worth while to go down into Yorkshire for a fortnight. It would be a great inconvenience to me should the news prove true."

"Far worse to us," said Lady Arthur. "For we are no longer in Parliament; so that it is indispensable for Arthur to

remain abroad."

"You are in great haste to anticipate evil," interposed Sir Richard. "Even were Napoleon re-established at the head of affairs, what can be more unlikely than that he would repeat his long-repented blunder of the detention of English tourists?

It is his object to conciliate the nation.

"Old Crutt. always said there was colloguing going on betwixt the French and the Papists," whispered young Maule, half audibly, to his sister, after swallowing another glass of cham-pagne. "You see that he wasn't very wide of the mark."

"In that case," said Matilda, replying with great self-com-mand to her husband's previous remark, "the best thing we can do is to remain here. I have not the slightest fear. I have no doubt the report will prove a stock-jobbing fabrication.

Before she could conclude the sentence, the door was thrown

open, and Colonel Noel made his appearance.

"Noel,—and on opera night? This is really kind of you." said Sir Richard, heartily wishing him at the antipodes. glass of Mouton after your drive?"

But Noel was too deeply engaged in inquiring after the health of Lady Norman, and marvelling whom the uncouth savage by

her side could be, to reply to the invitation.

"Do you bring us any news?" inquired Matilda.
"Nothing since five o'clock. The telegraph is, of course,

dumb at this hour."

- "The telegraph?" cried Cruttenden Maule, gazing with open eyes on the slender young gentleman so much at ease with himself and the world.
- "Napoleon is at Lyons, and the Tuileries off for Gand," added Colonel Noel, with perfect sang-froid, nodding to Norman over his wine.

"Authentic?" demanded his mother.

"Beyond dispute. Old Tal. left Paris for Belgium five hours

ago."
"Then all is lost!" replied Lady Dawlish, with her usual listlessness. "Relapse is worse than disease. These wretched French will never a second time submit to the restoration of the Bourbons."

"Restoration of the Bourbons!" ejaculated Cruttenden Maule. "Who the deuce cares for the Bourbons? What's to become of us?"

"I beg you will be under no apprehension, Lady Dawlish," said Noel addressing his mother. "I sent off a courier to Brussels, to secure horses for you and apartments at the Belle Vue.

"Why not secure horses towards England at once?"

"Most of our set are going to Brussels. As well to have the air of accompanying the royal family," replied the colonel.

"Shall we be in any danger then, sir, by staying in Paris?"

demanded Maule.

Noel looked amazed to find himself addressed by the anonymous savage. But answered not a word.

" I asked whether you thought we should get into any scrape

by remaining a day or two in Paris?" again demanded young

"We have secured horses to Brussels," replied Noel.

"So I heard you say. But me, and Matty, and the rest of

"The rest of you?" retorted the colonel, clearly of opinion that the world could produce no duplicate of so monstrous a vulgarian.

"I mean all the English in Paris?"

"I cannot presume to give an opinion, sir. The Hotel Belle Vue would scarcely contain them, nor anything else, I imagine, short of the capacities of Noah's Ark, added he. turning with a fastidious smile to Lady Arthur D.

"After all, then, it may turn out vastly pleasant," observed Lady Dawlish, addressing her exclusive friend and confederate. "We shall muster strong at Brussels; and a month or two

hence, one might try Spa.

"Have you seen Arthur, and what are his plans?" inquired Lady Arthur of the Colonel.

"We all start at daylight. He makes our arrangements in Paris; while I undertake your ladyship and my mother. Not

an hour to be lost, if we mean to countenance the king.

"What a pity that we can't all start together!" cried Maule. "It's madness to talk of staying here, and tempting Nap! There's no saying how he may take things, in revenge for his twelve months spent in quod. Matty, I won't hear of your remaining here. Be reasonable, and set off to-morrow morning with my lady and the rest of your friends."

"Do not concern yourself, sir, on Lady Norman's account," said Sir Richard, sternly. "I am the person responsible for her safety. But as you appear uneasy, and your negotiations in Paris are at end, I strongly advise you to lose no time in

hastening home."

"Thank you for nothing! You won't have twice to tell me that!" cried Crutt. "Catch me in Paris this time to-morrow, and I'll say something to you! Why, if I was to be made prisoner of war, our business at home would go all to smash; it's as much as they can do to keep matters straight without me, when I spin over to Cheltenham for a week's lark. May be, these ladies and gentlemen would give me a cast back to Paris to-night?"

" My carriage is at your service," replied Norman, resolved not to afford so rich a treat at his expense to Noel and Lady Arthur as would be afforded by the company of his brother-inlaw. And when, at the close of an anxious half hour to Matilda, her fair friends took leave of her with a cool " à revoir!" as if they were engaged to meet again the following night at the opera, rather than part to encounter the terror of civil war, Sir Richard accompanied them to Colonel Noel's dormeuse; and instead of returning immediately to the drawingroom, gave orders to his confidential English servant to accompany Mr. Maule back to Paris, and accelerate as far as possible

his preparations for departure from the country.

"Your arrival here still seems like a dream," observed Matilda, when at length she found herself alone with her brother.

"And a deuced ugly dream it's beginning to be!" cried Crutt., taking possession of the fireplace, and rubbing his legs. "Surely you will remain till to-morrow morning?" resumed

his sister, kindly.

"If you'll engage to set off back with me to England."
"Impossible. We have innumerable arrangements to make, previous to taking such a step. But I want to ask you a thousand questions about my father, about my sisters and brothers, about home. Surely you might remain till to-morrow

morning?

"And be snapped up before I know what I am about, till the next peace? No, no! I tell you, Matty, 'twould be the ruin of the business and the family, if anything was to happen to me. I was loath enough to come, only father and Tom Cruttenden would make me. The truth is," he continued, lowering his voice, and looking suspiciously towards the door, "they've set it into their foolish and the supplementation of the supplementa got it into their foolish heads that you're not so happy as you pretend to be, in foreign parts, and that you are not at liberty to say so. So, knowing me to be pretty sharp, old Tom proposed my making a pretence of the deal we'd got the offer of, to start for Paris, and see how the land was lying. And father bid me say that if you'd the least mind to come back, and money was the obstacle, to make no bones of drawing upon Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset & Co., for whatever was wanting. Money ought not to be a hindrance, Matty, to any whim you may take just now!"

"Believe me, pecuniary considerations have nothing to do

with the case," said Ledy Norman, colouring deeply.
"So much the worse, so much the worse!" cried young Maule; the kindly warmth of his uncouth nature becoming apparent the moment he began to anticipate evil for his sister. "For so long as there was hope that matters might be mended by the ready, no fear of things turning out cross, so long as Cruttenden Maule acts as cashier. But mum! for here comes Sir Richard! Not a word to him. Only, whenever the wind wants raising, for your own wants or wishes, please to remember which way it sets.

A hearty shake of the hand concluded this unpolished harangue; and the tears which Matilda had with difficulty restrained throughout the evening, fell profusely at this demonstration of the untiring affection of her neglected family. Poor Maule, meanwhile, attributing her emotion to the grief of parting from him so abruptly, bade her cheer up, and not be down-hearted on his account; that he would write from Paris, Calais, London, Dover, home, to satisfy her misgivings on his account.

At that moment Sir Richard re-entered the room. The stifled sobs of his wife, and the earnestness with which her brother was attempting to console her, instantly excited suspicions in his mind; and threw an additional shade of loftiness into his adieus to the untutored lad, who had come so far, to a country he abhorred, and of whose very language he was ignorant, on an errand of service to the alienated daughter of his father's house.

CHAPTER XII.

Valuent? Foolish curs, that run winking into the mouth of a Russian bear? You may as well say that's a valiant fice that dare eat his breakfast on' the lip of a lion!—Sakaspears.

Though aware that her husband's eyes were fixed upon her in surprise and displeasure, Lady Norman gave free course to her tears when the carriage containing her brother rolled from the gates of the château. The rapidly-following events of that harassing day had overpowered her. The visit of her inquisitive friends, the arrival of her brother, and, above all, the great incident bringing with it so vast a train of evils and perplexities, filled her with emotion. Could it really be the intention of Sir Richard to expose her, for the furtherance of his guilty project, to dangers that were driving from Paris the rest of his countrymen?

Perplexed by misgivings touching the motives of such singular obstinacy, she sat concealing with her hands her tearful eyes and throbbing brow. Undmindful that he was pacing the room with hurried footsteps, she took no note of his presence, fill she found one of her hands suddenly snatched with an agitated grasp, and saw that Sir Richard was kneeling beside

her chair.

"Matilda!" said he, in a faltering voice, "these tears, these murmurs, are a reproach greater than I can bear. Notwithstanding your exemplary resignation to my wishes, I discern all your griefs; and my remorse is indeed bitter. I have involved you in a maze of difficulty and deceit. I have plunged you into anxieties, how little to have been apprehended at such a moment, your own judgment must assure you. And it is too late to recede. Believe it, on the attestation of the anguish that now distracts my mind, dearest, it is too late to recede.

The suspicions of the Normans are awakened. Already they are keeping watch upon our movements, which, by remaining here alone, I shall be able to defeat. The importunate intru-sion of those two detestable women this morning, was a mere visit of observation, suggested by Lady Catherine Norman. Often repeated (as it would be, were you to fall at Brussels into their coterie), the frankness of your ingenuous nature would break through all disguise. Answer me candidly, were you not, during their presence here, repeatedly on the point of betraying yourself?

"I own it," replied Lady Norman, with a profound sigh; "Deceit weighs heavy upon my soul. I was reared in the fear of God and the paths of truth. I cannot, without remorse of conscience, take this guilt upon my head."

"Once more, then, I throw myself upon your mercy," cried Norman, excited almost to frenzy. "Once more, and for the last time, I appeal to your affection for a concession such as never woman yet had power to vouchsafe to a husband. Tell me honestly that you have not courage to confront the annoyances that may await us here; and even now, at the eleventh hour, I will renounce my projects—submit to my mortification -defy the laughter of the world, and griefs more poignant than you can guess! But if you have fortitude and self-command to sacrifice, for my sake, a woman's fears, I swear to you that you will attach me to your feet by more than any common tie of human tenderness. You will render your wayward, capricious husband, humble as becomes the obligation you confer, and grateful as he ought ever to have been for your unchanging gentleness and love.

Sir Richard was convulsed with tears as he uttered this earnest expostulation; and, unused to such vivid demonstrations of feeling, Matilda listened with a degree of emotion almost equal to his own. But soon, her perturbation subsided as a deeper sorrow took possession of her soul.

"Deal fairly with me!" said she, involuntarily withdrawing

her hand. "Admit that there are circumstances connected with your present plans, either beyond your power to divulge,

or beyond your inclination?"
"I do!" replied Norman, meeting with firm but not unfeeling steadiness the inquiring glances of his wife. "Were my wishes and hopes alone concerned, I would sacrifice them at once to appease your slightest anxiety. But there is much which I am solemnly pledged to bear and to conceal, in bearing and concealing which, I have not the shadow of right to require your co-operation. There have been moments, indeed, when I have fancied it better to give myself up to ruin, and fling away my life and honour, rather than bind you to the fulfilment of a promise extorted in a moment of too confiding love. But the welfare and peace of mind of others are staked

upon the issue; and for their sakes, I feel it a duty to appeal once more to the affection you profess to bear me. Should this influence be insufficient, I submit without a murmur. Neither now, or at any future time, shall a word of reproach or irritation betray the extent of my disappointment.'

"You have justly calculated on the weakness of my nature," said Matilda, voluntarily restoring the hand she had mechani-

cally withdrawn.

"Say rather on its generosity!" interrupted Norman, in a depressed voice, pressing it to its lips. "You are kinder to me

than I deserve.

"I make no demands upon your confidence," resumed Matilda, vexed by a demonstration of tenderness which she regarded as hypocritical. "There are mysteries upon which, perhaps, even a wife has no right to encroach. But, while admitting the insufficiency of my privilege, I claim at least justice at your hands. If I renounce for your sake the susceptibility, or,—let me do myself justice,—the sensibility of my sex,—lay aside in your turn the reserve with which you deteriorate the happiness I should otherwise find in rendering you service. Do not exact from me the sacrifices of a friend, and treat me with the mistrust due to an enemy. Do not again expose me to the sneers which my incertitude with respect to our plans, drew this morning from Lady Arthur and Lady Dawlish. Let me know definitively what I am to do,—say, suffer,—and it shall be suffered, done, and said. In one word, are we, under every possible contingency, to remain here?"

"We are." "Such then shall be my answer, should the Guerchants visit St. Sylvain, as you anticipate. And next, what motive am I to

assign for my resolution?

"Your own choice," replied Sir Richard, in a less assured voice. "Your disinglination to hazard a removal at such a

"And when do you intend the event to take place which is to set us at liberty?" demanded Matilda, an involuntary accent of

scorn tempering her usually gentle voice.

"About the middle of April. I have made every arrangement to that effect. Madame Gervais (the woman I have engaged to attend you, according to the custom of most French ladles of your rank in life) has been placed in my confidence, and secured by a considerable bribe. At the period specified, she will arrive here late one evening, with an infant selected for the purpose at the hospital of the Maternité or Enfans trouvés, where my man of business undertakes the legal act of adoption without compromising my name. The following morning it will be announced to the family that you are a mother. The infant furtively intro-duced into the house by Madame Gervais will thenceforward pass for your own."

"Thanks!" replied Lady Norman, unconscious of the air of bitterness infused into her tones and glances. "I have now learned my lesson, and am content. It is some years since I placed my happiness in your keeping, and resigned my will to your disposal. May this second and gratuitous act of submission bring forth the good fruits you announce!"

"Forgive me," cried Norman, "if, instead of making grateful acknowledgments, I ask of you an avowal that may be painful to your feelings. Was this extraordinary visit of your brother prompted solely by its ostensible motive? Do I not rightly guess that your family entertain some suspicion of the truth?"

"You wrong them," replied Matilda, calmly. "Rude and uncivilized, you may have a right to consider them. But there is not one among the inmates of my father's house capable of imagining so vile a proceeding as that in which we are engaged."

Sir Richard's usual irritability suffused his cheek for a moment. But he was in no position to hazard provocation. He felt, at that moment, with grievous consciousness, the superiority over himself with which he had been forced to invest

his wife.

"But to deal with you as candidly as I have required you to deal with myself," resumed Lady Norman, "my brother's journey to France had other motives than the one avowed. My family, more tender of my happiness than I deserve, fear that I am detained here against my will; that my heart, on the eve of the event I have falsely announced to them, may be yearning after home,—friends,—comforts,—affection. They accordingly despatched my brother to offer us the means of returning to the security of Selwood Maner, in case motives of economy detained us abroad. You must forgive my father," continued Lady Norman in a faltering voice. "He is an inexperienced, uneducated man, and has been led to believe that France is a place of peril to his daughter. He does not reconcile himself to the idea of her encountering the hazards of childbirth among strangers and enemies. You must forgive my poor old father."

Subdued by the peculiar tone assumed by Matilda, Sir Richard contented himself with replying—"But after I had so positively assured him that pecuniary interests had no share in my pro-

ceedings."

"Anxiety on his child's account induced him, I suppose, to fancy that you were deceiving him," replied Matilda; and Norman dared not, as he would have done at any other moment, burst forth into a defence of his own honour and integrity, the words being searcely silent upon his lips which had conveyed a lesson of deliberate duplicity to his wife.

The following morning, before the breakfast things were removed, Admiral Guerchant was with them, in all his elation of triumph and happiness. Matilda could scarcely recognise her cheerful but composed old friend of the Place Royale, in the sparkling, excited, rejuvenised man who came to tender the performance of his recent engagements to the stranger in the

land.

"How I longed to give you a little hint of what was in the wind the morning you called upon us! Do you remember that last morning you called upon us?" said he, addressing Lady Norman. And a pang of reminiscence almost induced her to exclaim, "Alas! how can I forget? It was the first dawn of the agonizing suspicions which have since made me so wretched."

"All was even then in progress," resumed the admiral; "and both Madame Guerchant and myself burned to assure you that the offer of our services was no idle vaunt. You are determined, however, to rise superior to the vulgar terrors of your countrymen, and put your trust in the emperor's justice? You will not fly from Paris, like all these moths and butterflies of the Wel-

lington coterié?"

"We have no intention of leaving France," said Sir Richard,

in a constrained manner.

"We intend to remain quietly at the Chateau de St. Sylvain,"

added Matilda.

"The château? Pardieu, I don't know that I recommend that," cried the admiral. "Come back into Paris, if you will. Your term in the Rue de Provence is not yet expired?" "The hotel belongs to the Duc de Vergnies," said Norman, "who, resuming his functions at court, will of course require

the use of his residence."

"You conceive, then, that the emperor's field-marshals will come down hot-handed upon everything they can lay their hands on?" demanded the admiral, with a hearty laugh. "No, no. Law is law—the code, the code, whether an N or an L be entwined among the vignettes of the golden cornice at the Tuileries. If you have a lease of Vergnies's house, it will stand

good, even were he the prime minister."
"I have already received this morning, and answered in the affirmative, a polite request from the Duc de Vergnies that, as we are not occupying his house, I would cede it to him for the remainder of the term. I could not, without ungraciousness,

refuse his request."

"Let that be no obstacle," cried the good admiral. "I am about to remove to the Hôtel de la Marine. The emperor honours my services with a ministerial portfolio; and, in the interim, my humble home in the Marais is thoroughly at your service; unless, indeed, Lady Norman will still further favour us, and, by becoming our inmate at the Admiralty, procure to my good wife the satisfaction of presiding over the birth of your son and heir. 'Tis a ceremony, you know, in which my halfdozen married sons and daughters afford her annual experience." "Thanks—a thousand thanks!" cried Matilda, compas-

signating the embarrassment of her husband. "But I have made up my mind to remain here. I love the quiet of this place; and, above all, should fear the confusion of a ministerial residence. You do not reflect, my dear, good admiral, that were any popular tumult to occur, your house would be one of

the first to be attacked.

"We don't intend to have any popular tumults; and my house, private or ministerial, has not a chance of being attacked, cried Guerchant. "The Parisians are for once unanimous in their welcome to the emperor. The whole city is in a tumult of joy; and under every possible vicissitude its good will has attended me. The badauds have a personal liking for the old man who has advanced their glory with his blood without opposing their interests in the senate."

"Still you will admit that the grant their street and their street an

"Still, you will admit that the versatility of their character renders them uncertain allies," pleaded Matilda, with a smile.
"I admit everything asserted by a fair lady," said the old

man, gaily; "but she must believe me, on the other hand, that, though perfectly secure in Paris, she may not be so well off here. The peasantry are little to be depended upon. They entertain a deep-seated abhorrence of the English. Already they have evinced an intemperate spirit against the allies of the Bourbons, whenever an opportunity has presented itself. If by chance, since your sojourn here at St. Sylvain, that Madame de Montrond of yours has paraded her way down to you in one of the royal carriages, the villagers have already marked you as royalists, and will insult, if not otherwise molest you.

I am not afraid," said Matilda, with a fainter smile;

"believe me, I am not afraid."

"Like the emperor, you trust to your star," replied the

admiral.

"She trusts to the influence of her own good deeds," interrupted Norman. "Since her arival here, Matilda has done twice as much for the village as the proprietors of St. Sylvain during the last ten years. The people are disposed to worship rather than insult their benefactress."

"You don't know the French peasantry!" cried the admiral. "Their prejudices are ferocious. They possess a peculiar faculty for hating; and were your Vilainton or Castelri to spend for-tunes in converting their hovels into palaces, or in mending their roads with golden ore, it would not prevent them from mixing poison in his cup, should he ask a draught of water in return.

"You are doing your utmost to alarm me, I see," said Matilda, with an unchanging countenance; "but I am not to be frighted from my purpose. Be it courage, be it obstinacy, I am resolved to remain at St. Sylvain. Remember!" said she, turning towards her husband; "and do not let admiral Guerchant dissuade you from acceding to my wishes."

Norman thanked her with an eloquent look.

"I wish I had more time to devote to the task of persuasion," cried the admiral, rising to depart. "But my horses' heads are turned towards Auxerre, where I am to meet the emperor, and assist in escorting him to Paris. And never bridegroom so longed to look upon the face of bride, as I (God bless him!) upon Napoleon's! "Tis twelve months since I parted from him at Fontainebleau. Even now I seem to feel the grasp of hand with which he bade me a silent adieu. He would not hear of my accompanying him to Elba. He knew the force of family ties upon my heart, and was too generous to hazard the safety of the old tree by rooting it up. But I knew that we should have him here again. I knew that the wishes of a whole people would not be in vain. I knew that the sceptre of an indolent, selfish voluptuary, was not for the energies of France. I was as sure of feeling that grasp upon my old hand again as I was of life, or never could I have supported the weight of the last eleven months of humiliation. And before night I shall shake hands with him!" cried the admiral, tears glistening in his enthusiastic eyes at the thought,—"with him who was the making of me and mine,—with him, who knew how to create loyal servants and glorious actions, for he knew how to reward them. Sacristie! how I want to hear his voice again, even if inflicting one of those reprimands which he could render so terrible! But I am running on, and neglecting my duty elsewhere, without compassing any advantage here," he continued, rising and kissing Matilda's hand as a signal for departure. "I shall be a proud man, fair lady, when I see you again. But I trust it will be under my own roof, where I leave it to Madame Guerchant to determine you to take up your abode."

· CHAPTER XIII.

Sick minds are like sick men that burn with fevers, Who, when they drink, please but a present taste, And after, bear a more impatient fit.

BEN JONSON.

THOUGH aware that it was impossible to accept the generously-offered hospitality of the Guerchants, it was a comfort to Matilda to feel that she had such friends settled in Paris. Her brother had notified to her his departure. The English had fled the city; many in real alarm and consternation, others making it a political virtue to demonstrate their attachment to the Tory banner floating over the heads of the fugitive

Bourbons.

But the Whig baronet had a plausible pretext for not following the flying footsteps of the satellites of Toryism; and Matilda had the comfort of finding the admiral's prognostications fallacious as regarded the peasantry of St. Sylvain. Flattered by the determination of the opulent English family to remain in France when such legions of their country-people were flying in all directions, they seemed desirous to make proof of their respect towards the inhabitants of the château, as towards hostages deposited in their hands. A week had not elapsed after the triumphant re-entrance of Napoleon, before Lady Norman felt perfectly at ease. Her chief regret arose from the anxieties which she knew would be experienced in her behalf by her friends in Worcestershire.

But though at ease on her own account, she was not altogether satisfied, when, instead of giving her credit for self-command, Sir Richard chose to make the position of public affairs a theme for exultation, proclaiming his satisfaction in any change of circumstances that secured them from the espionage of the Normans. She could not refrain from secretly

taxing him with indifference towards her feelings.

So long subdued in spirit, passive and indulgent, Lady Norman scarcely recognised herself now, when, pacing up and down her vast apartments in solitary perturbation, she reflected on all that had been exacted of her, and the exactions still to come. Conscious of being a puppet in the hands of her husband, she felt that not even the ennobling motive of affection which rendered her so docile in his hands, could excuse the blindness of her devotion. He had promised that the happiness of her future life should repay her subservience. But

her subservience was guilt, falsehood, hypocrisy, meanness, guile; and these, what could repay? Was she not doubly degraded by his admission that there existed a secret in which she must not participate? That he had other motives for choosing to remain in France than the mere desire to impose upon the world by the adoption of a supposititious child?

Impossible for the mind of woman, even if endowed with a far stronger frame of philosophy than that of Lady Norman, to abstain from pondering upon these mysteries, whenever she found herself alone. Her self-command scarcely availed to desist from questioning Sir Richard when they were together. His own word had now confirmed the vague insinuations hazarded by Madame de Montrond. He had avowed the existence of ties in which she did not participate. What needed there more to bring the life-blood throbbing to her heart—the rising moisture to her troubled brow—when she reflected how far she might have been betrayed by him to whom her

life was so generously devoted?

Nevertheless, amid all her anguish, there abided consolation. Matilda's perceptions had been stimulated by the last year of observation, till every change of Norman's countenance became a source of revelation; and they had not long been inhabitants of St. Sylvain before she felt convinced that, whatever might be the nature of the mysteries involving her husband, his affection for herself was gradually returning. It was neither pity nor policy that prompted the glances she occasionally detected in his countenance, and the thousand nameless kindnesses which arise only from the fulness of affection. Policy might determine him to the companionship with which he chose to lighten the cheerless hours of her probation; or compassion towards the wife he was wronging, instigate him to lighten the burthen of her cares. But she often surprised him gazing upon her with self-reproachful admiration. When referring in conversation to the conduct of other women, she observed that his commendations were reserved for the mild domestic beings, of character analogous to her own; and that he praised her, by inference, in praising the virtues she practised. He grew impatient if the slightest of her commands was neglected by the household; and seemed to live for the promotion of her comfort. And all this was done without forfeiture of the air of graceful superiority peculiar to Sir Richard Norman, and as if he felt aware that his services were unworthy her acceptance.

One day, when she saw him disposed to pass the morning sauntering with her among the fine avenues of chesnut-trees sloping from the chateau to the Seine, and dignified with the name of park, she could not forbear reproaching him with his want of curiosity in not having visited Paris since the reinauguration of the emperor. For though Admiral Guerchant

had counselled him to avoid, in the first instance, exhibiting himself in any public place, the interdict was now withdrawn; the Ministre do la Marine having not only mentioned to the emperor the motive of Sir Richard and Lady Norman's sojourn in France, but placed them under the especial protection of the police.

"I have, as you accuse me, very little interest in the sub-ject," he replied. "Napoleon is in my eyes neither the demigod worshipped by his partisans, nor the monster vituperated by the English press. I look upon him in the light he is defined

by the Abbé de Pradt, as a Jupiter Scapin!"

"Still, Jupiter Scapins have not often fallen in our way. The Scapins one usually sees, are intriguing valets," said Matilda, playfully. "A Scapin holding a thunderbolt is a curious variety of the species.

"But to me not an interesting one."

"If you will not take a peep at him to gratify your own curiosity, at least satisfy mine," pleaded Matilda.

"No!" replied Norman, decisively; "I have made up my

mind not to visit Paris."

"Say at once that you have pledged yourself not to go," said

Lady Norman, incautiously.

"I should think you might have discovered by this time that I am no great maker of promises," he resumed, more gravely, "even to you who have a right to require them. But what other human being has a claim upon my word?"

"In short, for obstinacy sake, you are determined not to go?" rejoined Lady Norman, feeling that she was proceeding too far. "and I must resign myself not to torment you further

on the subject.

But to adhere to this promise was easier than to refrain from tormenting herself; for the mystery was constantly uppermost in her mind. Though Sir Richard had admitted himself bound by some mysterious tie to remain in France, he held communion with no living soul beyond the precincts of the chateau. He received no letters—he paid no visits—he maintained no fur-ther intercourse with the capital. Of what nature, then, were the bonds that hung upon him thus loosely? Neither love nor friendship admits of utter neglect. Neither friend nor mistress would support with patience such total forgetfulness. Yet what but love or friendship has power to excite emotions such as Matilda had seen convulse the very soul of her husband?

A sudden thought occurred to her (and with what transport did she welcome the conjecture!) that his engagements might be of a political nature. Recalling rapidly to mind the ardour with which, for two years previous to his visit to the continent, he had involved himself in the intrigues of the Catholic cause, his laborious correspondence, his princely liberality, and connecting his own sojourn at Paris with the sudden departure of the Abbé for Italy, she became convinced that Madame de Montrond's suggestions were correct; that in spite of pretended indifference, he was deeply interested in political intrigues, not as regarded the state of France, but the Church of Rome.

Her soul brightened in a moment. True to her own faith and modes of worship, she had never seen cause for reproach in the devotedness of her husband to his suffering Church. And now, with a degree of fervour, such as Tom Cruttenden would have trembled to behold, she rejoiced in the idea of his being an emissary of the Jesuits. She saw all in the clearest light. Sir Richard had, doubtless, pledged himself to the Abbé to be on the spot as his intermediary agent, in too sacred a manner to admit of succumbing even to the unexpected force of public events. The only letters that reached him at St. Sylvain were in the Abbe's handwriting; and after perusing them, the mind of the baronet was invariably disturbed and pre-occupied for the remainder of the day. It was, doubtless, some religious scruple that prevented him from taking a Protestant into his confidence; a scruple she had no desire to overcome; regretting only that a mystery so valueless in her eyes as a political or ecclesiastical intrigue, should have induced her to wrong her husband by gratuitous mistrust.

This fact once established in her mind, the spirits of Matilda rose in a manner wholly inexplicable to Sir Richard. She so far surmounted her repugnance to the project in which she had promised connivance, as to allude frequently to her anticipations of delight in the acquisition of the little stranger who was to be to them as a son. She spoke of it as though it was almost to be a child of her own; nay, even appealed to his tenderness in its favour, as though pleading for her own offspring.

"Remember," said she, as they were sauntering together in the park of St. Sylvain, one fine April afternoon, watching the progress of the chestnut buds as they glistened and expanded in the sunshine, "Remember, I must have no impatience, no ill-humour, with my boy. I put up sometimes with your pettishness, on my own account, because I know that I am troublesome, and that you have had much to try your patience in my inexperience and ignorance of the world. But we are responsible for the faults of the little creature we shall have dragged out of its natural sphere. And I insist on your being as kind and forbearing towards it, as the tenderest father in the world."
"You do not surely consider me such a monster as to ill-use

it?" demanded Sir Richard, abruptly.

"God forbid!" replied Matilda, in an earnest tone. there is a wide difference between ill-usage, and the kindness I shall exact for my child. Without rendering myself as ridiculous as Lady Catherine, I shall, perhaps, become a very doting mamma; and I wish to prepare you for my weakness."

Involuntarily Sir Richard pressed to his side the arm that was locked within his own. Something of the spirit of old times was arising between them. Matilda's nature was so frank, that just as impossible as it had been to mistake her previous pique and bitterness, was it now to misconstrue the joyousness that took possession of her breast from the moment of deciding that the mysterious figure in the dark chariot was a hishop, or perhaps a cardinal, residing incognito in Paris as the accredited agent of the Propaganda!

In this happy frame of mind did she await the arrival of Madame Gervais and the promised babe. Relying upon the prudence of Sir Richard for the disposal of every arrangement, she made it her sole request, that Ghita, the Italian waiting-maid whom she found to be in his confidence, might never be permitted to confer with her on the subject. There was something of latent scorn occasionally visible in the woman's countenance, which, in spite of the obsequiousness of her deportment, rendered her service peculiarly unwelcome to Matilda; and she felt that she should have no patience with the woman, if emboldened by the functions of a confederate. From the first, it had been her custom to wait upon herself, rather than summon Ghita to her aid: and so strict was the silence still maintained towards her by the woman concerning the approaching event, that it was clear she was obeying the instructions of Sir Richard.

The middle of April arrived; and, expecting that the nurse and child would soon make their appearance also, Lady Norman confined herself to her apartment. She amused herself with examining the splendid preparations for the little stranger: the lace, the cambric, the rosewood rockers, the fringed curtains of cachemire and India muslin. And though a sigh often . escaped her that this cost and care were for an alien, and that she was guilty of a heavy fault in conniving at an imposition, there was enough of the frailty of human tenderness in her heart to sink all other considerations in the triumph of being freed from her jealous cares, and the hope of being once more

united, heart and soul, to her husband.

On the eighteenth of the month, however, no tidings having reached them from Madame Gervais, Sir Richard, apprehensive perhaps of some misunderstanding, entered Lady Norman's room at an early hour; and with some perturbation of manner, announced that he should proceed that day to Paris, to ascertain the exact intentions of his confederate. The project was warmly applauded by Lady Norman. But at that moment, the countenance of Ghita, who was arranging the glossy tresses of her lady's hair, happened to meet Matilda's observation, in the glass before which she was sitting; and it was impossible

to mistake the smile of contempt with which, as she conversed with her husband, she saw herself contemplated by the Italian

Startled and indignant, Lady Norman was on the point of reprehending her insolence, when the sense of her own perplexing position reduced her to silence. She covered her embarrassment by renewing her advice to Sir Richard to lose no time in repairing to Paris; and again, though she still spoke in English, a language which Ghita affected not to understand, the same insolent glance of disdain sparkled in the eyes of the Italian.

So affected was Matilda at the moment by this disagreeable incident, that she had not leisure to take note of the agitation of her husband. Even when he was gone, she sat alone in her chamber musing upon the annoyance of being compelled to accept the services of a person who regarded her with undisguised

contempt.

The day wore slowly away. The weather was genial as immer. But in anticipation of the events the evening might bring forth, Lady Norman felt almost guilty of an indiscretion when, in spite of Sir Richard's absence, she ventured on her usual stroll in the park; and accompanied by her Selwood favourite, her faithful Rover, proceeded so far as the fine alley of lime-trees, now almost covered with their spring verdure, which shaded an extensive terrace of turf overhanging the Seine.

The air was fragrant with a thousand violets. Spring breezes swept invigoratingly from the river. It was a moment for happy thoughts, could Matilda have given free course to her innocent gaiety of heart in company with her friends the Ravenscrofts, or her own cheerful, chatty sister Elizabeth. But her heart recoiled when she reflected upon her isolation as the compulsory inhabitant of a foreign country; surrounded by strange servants,—attended by an insolent Italian,—and on the brink of an action which, if exposed, must sink her in the estimation of every friend: nay, which, though secured from detection, lessened her immeasurably in her own. But for the ever-ready sophistry of love whispering consolation in the plea of a benefit conferred upon her husband, Matilda would, at that moment, have given herself up to despair!

Overpowered by her reflections, she threw herself down to rest upon a moss grown stone seat commanding the river; and, at some distance along its windings, the ruins of the once sumptuous palace of Choisy-le-roi, a century ago, the high altar-stone of the temple of voluptuousness. Glancing towards the shattered fragments of its white arcades, Matilda bethought her of the lovely Duchesse de Chateauroux,—her struggles, her fall, her penitence, her early death; and a train of remorseful meditations arose in her mind upon the insufficiency of even

love itself to sanctify a cause abhorrent to the dictates of

"The time may come," thought she, fixing her eyes upon the sparkling current of the river, "when he for whose sake I am sacrificing my consciousness of duty, will revile me for having ceded to his wishes. Should the imposture be detected, or should the poor child turn out unsatisfactorily, it is upon

me Norman will turn with reproach."

Her contemplations were at that moment interrupted by the fall of a stone flung with some violence from the river, and evidently impelled towards her with a view of attracting attention, not of inflicting injury. The spaniel crouching at her feet instantly darted forward with a growl, and began rolling over and over the missile, as if an object of some peculiar interest. It was in vain she called to Rover to desist. intelligent animal would not relinquish his efforts till Lady Norman, stooping down to fling the stone back again into the river, perceived that a paper was attached to it, bearing her own superscription.

With an instinctive movement of surprise and terror, she glanced hastily round, to ascertain from what quarter, or by whom, the stone could have been thrown. But not a creature was within sight; the trees were too imperfectly clothed with verdure to admit of any person being concealed among the branches. Not so much as a boat or barge was perceptible on the stream. Nothing was to be seen but one of the long trains or rafts of wood, floating from Burgundy towards Paris, to be broken up for firing, and the peasants who were steering its course from the opposite shore, out of reach of the territory of

St. Sylvain.

It occurred to her, however, that the bank of the river below the terrace was in many places hollowed by the action of the current; so that any person having attained the spot from the river, might remain concealed among the ledges of shrubby ground below. From such an ambush, it would be as easy to clamber up towards the spot where she was standing, as to launch the fragment of stone; and Matilda expected every moment to see emerge from the overhanging bank some strange and menacing figure. Yet she had not courage to fly. She stood rooted to the place, holding the slip of paper she had detached; on which was inscribed in English, in a strange handwriting,—" Beware. Submit not to be the dupe of a dupe."

From the paper, Lady Norman glanced towards the bank. from the bank to the paper, -incapable for some moments of thought or action. The dog still went sniffing along the shore; and at length Matilda took courage to follow in the same direction, and peer down with anxious eyes among the matted weeds and brambles. She determined to accost, if possible, the person from whom she had received so singular a warning, and insist upon further explanation. But the effort with which she formed this resolution was thrown away. No human being appeared. The dog, a sure indicator, abandoned his pursuit; and disposed itself to follow Lady Norman. There was not even a trace among the bushes of recent passage; no boat moored below, no indication of any kind to guide her conjectures. More distressed than ever, she hastened homewards, and took refuge in her own apartment.

For the first time her heart sickened at the sight of the beautiful cradle established in her dressing-room. When equipping herself for her walk, she had glanced towards these preparatives with a smile of delight at the idea of the enlivenment and solace her isolated existence was about to attain in her expected little companion. But she longed no more for the stir and bustle of the nursery. The word "dupe" filled her with dismay; refrigerating even her womanly kindness towards the

child.

All her perplexities were returning. Ghita's air of impertinence that morning, her husband's embarrassment, and now, this mysterious admonition, seemed linked in torrhenting significance. Had Norman been in the house, she would have resigned herself to the impulse of her feelings, and insisted on a definite reply to every question she felt inclined to address him. But he was absent. She had only her own heart, her own memory, to interrogate. The one upbraided her weakness;

the other eluded her demands.

How wearily that morning,—that day,—that evening,—dragged along! Sir Richard did not return; and, obliged to confine herself to her room to escape the observations of the household, she attempted to beguile the tediousness of the time by the perusal of a new work. Every moment, however, she kept starting up, and going to the door to listen; or to a small window in her ante-chamber, overlooking the courtyard, in the hope of her husband's arrival. Still, at each succeeding attempt, she was disappointed. Sir Richard did not make his appearance; and again and again, she was obliged to have recourse to her book to get rid of the thronging thoughts that caused her pulse to beat and her burning cheeks to tingle. If, as her anonymous monitor asserted, she was a dupe, she was the dupe of Norman, of her husband! And what treachery could equal his, in practising upon one whom excess of affection chained in bondage at his feet; one who renounced her very reason and judgment to become his instrument; one who lived but in him and in his happiness!

Poor Matilda could scarcely believe in such cruelty. She determined to suspend all judgment on the subject till she had thrown herself into Sir Richard's arms, and, clinging to his

bosom, demanded the whole truth,

The book which accident had thrown in her way to beguile the hours of that eventful morning was "Adolphe;" a story vapid, because incomprehensible, to those whose feet have trodden only the monotonous paths of common life; but to the impassioned, the unhappy, the forsaken, the breviary of a religion of love and sorrow. It was the very book to stimulate her to a more curious examination of her griefs, and causes for grief.

As the time wore on, however, Matilda's suspicions gave way to anxiety. The usual dinner-hour was past, and no Sir Richard! Her meal having been served in her own apartment, she at length sent down to desire that monsieur might be no longer expected. But the dismissal of the servants' preparations did not render her mind more easy. Sir Richard's habits of life were punctuality itself. Unless at the period of his prolonged absence in France, Lady Norman had never seen him otherwise than exact to his appointments; and he had volunteered the promise of being back to dine at St. Sylvain.

That he might be detained by some dilemma connected with the conveyance of the infant into the Château, was far from improbable; and, impressed with this idea, Matilda would have subdued her disquietudes, but for that mysterious warning. Might not Sir Richard's absence at that moment constitute the treachery to which she was a dupe? Might he not be gone from her,—perhaps not to return for a length of time,—perhaps

to return no more?

A general shuddering seized her at the surmise of such an iniquity. But no, it could not be!—She had no right to think thus hardly of him at the suggestion of some nameless enemy. It was far more probable that she was herself the dupe of a delusion wantonly created. The scroll so incomprehensibly conveyed to her was "a thing devised by the enemy," a deception practised on her credulity by the Normans. Sir Richard was, far more probably, detained by some personal misadventure,—some blundering persecution of the Imperial police,—some sweeping measure directed against British residents in France. She half determined to despatch a messenger to Admiral Guerchant, entreating him to institute inquiries. It was only on recalling to mind that, should her alarm prove premature, it would be most injurious to Sir Richard's plans to direct towards his abode at such a moment the vigilance of the police, that Lady Norman was prudent enough to refrain.

There was nothing for it but patience! Fixing her eyes on the gorgeous pendule that graced her mantelpiece, she counted, minute by minute, the cheerless hours, till it became time to close the Château for the night. Though the vicinity of the house to a navigable river, as well as the constant transit of troops through the country, rendered it highly undesirable to leave its avenues undefended after midnight. Lady Norman

insisted that the servants should keep watch till one o'clock; not suffering the huge mastiffs, the usual guardians of the

domain, to be turned out.

At the appointed time, however, on hearing the great bars and bolts of the hall-doors drawn upon her, and remembering that Sir Richard was still away, she threw herself despairingly upon the sofa; to bewail the miserable destiny, which had thrown her, helpless and friendless, into the mercy of a capricious despot; far from the home of her youth,—far from the domestic sanotities of her native country.

CHAPTER XIV.

Here's a sight; look thee;—a bearing cloth
For a squire's child!—Take up, take up the babe!
SHAKSPEARE.

ALL was still as death in the Château.—Ghita, after her usual offers of assistance, had retired for the night; and Lady Norman lay watching, in indescribable anguish of spirit, the flickering of the night-light burning at the foot of her sofa. The figures reflected by the light through its vase of painted porcelain, seemed dancing fantastically on the opposite wall. The lofty alcove of the state bed looked dim and solemn, as it had never looked before. It was only by burying her face in the cushion of the sofa that she could shut out these unwelcome omens.

She dared not commit herself, according to her nightly habit, to the protection of Providence! On the eve of so enormous a breach of integrity, so gratuitous an act of false witnessing, there would be crime in the attempt. She must bear up against the force of her terrors, and the sense of helplessness that besets the guilty. She almost longed to call back the woman she detested, to preserve her from the self-communing of solitude.

detested, to preserve her from the self-communing of solitude. At length, the beneficent Power to which she dared not appeal for protection, had pity on her sufferings. Wearied by the agitation of the day, she slept; slept, and dreamt of home; of old familiar faces, old familiar rambles with her brothers and sisters among old familiar fields; where she was loud, and wild, and happy, without care or ambition to rise beyond the obscure condition of a manufacturer's daughter. The coarse, rude laugh of Cruttenden mingled in her dreams; the approving laugh he had been wont in other days to bestow upon the gambols of his partner's children. But of a sudden it changed to a tone of mockery, a tone of contemptuous accusation; and

he was reviling her in words half jest, half scorn, for having defrauded an honest man's family in behalf of a foundling, when, waking with a sudden shiver, she found the grey light of morning stealing into the room, and her husband standing

beside her.

"Ha! you are come at last!" she cried, starting from the sofa, and trying to compose her bewildered senses; when the surprise of finding him at that hour in her chamber, and a certain expression of wild delight irradiating his countenance, induced her to exclaim, "But how did you make an entrance here? I fancied I had secured the door?"

"You had. But I have a pass-key, I entered the Château soundly you sleep, dearest Matilda, that you did not hear my approach!"

Soundly, but not composedly," answered Matilda, as she gradually recovered her self-possession. "I have been dreaming painful dreams. I lay down in misery. Why did you not return last night? What detained you in Paris? Why not prepare me for the disappointment?"

"I did not know that you would feel it to be a disappointment," replied Norman, taking her hand between his, and gazing upon her with a still more rapturous expression of joy.

"But if my absence made you uneasy, I am indeed to blame

for playing truant."

But what can have occupied you so long in Paris?"

"In the first place, the brilliant preparations for the Champ de Mai, which induced me to idle away my morning among other gaping loungers. Having met Guerchant, who was superintending the labours of the engineers in the Champ de Mars, he induced me to return and dine with him.

"Then I am convinced you did not tell him you were expected back at St. Sylvain," cried Lady Norman. "The admiral is a man of too much gallantry to do anything tending

to keep me in such harassing suspense.

"I thought that, with your books and garden, and the fine weather, you would scarcely have leisure to note my absence. In this persuasion, after settling with Madame Gervais that night would be the most propitious moment for her entrance here, I determined to prolong my stay by a few hours, and avoid a second journey

"You saw Madame Gervais then?" demanded Lady Norman. her heart sinking from the momentary elation produced by her husband's presence, and resuming the careful looks produced

by the event of the preceding day.

"I did. Our preparations are complete. But you do not ask to see the child?" added he, in a lower voice; an anxious glance overshadowing for a moment the triumphant brightness of his face.

" The child!" faltered Matilda, turning deadly pale.

it then already here?"
"It is in my room, with the nurse. We had better lose no time in transporting the little creature hither, before the

servants are up and about."

And expecting to find Matilda second his proposals with the ardour she had recently displayed in the cause, Sir Richard was amazed to find that no word escaped her lips; and that every tinge of colour vanished from her face. A confusion of thoughts and feelings overpowered her. The word "dupe" was ringing in her troubled ears!

"You seem surprised, you seem displeased!" said he, astonished in his turn. "Did you not expect this? I understood from you yesterday morning, that all was prepared?"

"Yes!" faltered Matilda, neither daring to speak, nor to

remain silent.

"You remarked that no further time was to be lost: that I could not do better than come to an understanding with Madame Gervais without further delay!"

"Did I? Yes, I dare say I did!" replied Matilda, breath-

ing as though a heavy oppression hung upon her bosom.
"Yet now, you seem reluctant and vexed! How is this, Matilda?" cried he, growing alarmed in his turn. "Do you

mean to fail me in the hour of trial?'

"No!" cried Lady Norman, scarcely knowing what she replied, and anxious only to gain time for the recovery of her self-possession. "But make some allowance for the anguish of my heart at this eventful moment, in accepting from your hands a foundling,—an alien,—instead of having to present you with a child of my own!"

At this appeal, Sir Richard, encircling her affectionately with his arm, kissed the tears from her pale cheeks. At that moment, perhaps, she would have been reconciled to the event, and content to accede to his projects, but for the words still rankling

in her heart: "the dupe of a dupe!"

"The Normans are avenged!" thought Matilda, as she reclined her throbbing brow on her husband's shoulder. "The

injury I am inflicting on them is amply repaid."

After a moment's deference to her wounded feelings, Sir Richard seemed to remember that the business they had in hand was too important to be trifled with for the indulgence of

unavailing sensibility.

"It is essential, dearest," whispered he, in the most soothing manner, "that the nurse and child should be established in your apartment before the household is astir. Ghita is in readiness to light a fire in the adjoining chamber. Will you give me leave to bring in Madame Gervais?"

And on Matilda's assent, he quitted the room; and, by the duration of his absence, seemed inclined to give her time for perfect recovery. A woman would have judged more wisely, and allowed no leisure for reflection. The lapse of the next ten minutes re-excited the agitation of Lady Norman to so distracting a pitch, that, had the nurse on entering the room been at leisure to take note of her pretended patient, she might have concluded that she was summoned to attend a lunatic. Pale and haggard, she could scarcely support herself when Sir Richard, advancing towards her with the portly Madame Gervais, called her attention to the infant, whose little face he uncovered for her inspection.

"How hideous!" was Lady Norman's involuntary ejaculation, as the ghastly light of early morning gleamed upon the new-born babe; an object beauteous to the eye of a mother, but

distasteful enough to any indifferent spectator.

"Hideous?" reiterated Sir Richard, his air of triumphant satisfaction giving place to a glance of indignation. "It is one

of the finest infants I ever beheld."

And the nurse, comprehending from the tone of her employer that he was enlarging on the beauty of the child, burst forth into a clamour of eulogy, which did not prevent Lady Norman from retaining her opinion that she was looking upon a very ugly babe, attired in a very beautiful dress. Sir Richard did not think it worth while to controvert her decision. He addressed no further remark to her; but began questioning Madame Gervais as to the probability of its having taken cold, and the further arrangements to be made for its comfort and accommodation. He could not have interested himself more warmly in the little creature's welfare, had it been a child of his own.

"Never fear, monsieur, never fear. We shall do very well!" was the woman's reply, in the cordial motherly tone peculiar to her vocation. "You have been up all night. We don't want you here. Leave me with milédi, who has her acquaintance to make with this little personage here. Ghita will get me all I want; and in half an hour we shall have the wet-nurse here.

Leave me with milédi."

To Lady Norman's surprise, he quitted the room without further inquiry or remonstrance; evidently nettled by her hasty sentence of disapproval of the babe. She now felt conscious that she had spoken hastily and harshly; and when, a moment after Norman's departure, Madame Gervais placed the little creature unceremoniously in her arms, saying, "There! Hold it carefully for me a moment while I put things to-rights a bit, in the other room," instead of resenting the freedom, she extended her arms kindly to receive the poor foundling.

It was, perhaps, a proof of tact on the part of the old lady, that, instead of giving time to the pretended mother to recoil with disgust from the child forced on her adoption, she appealed instantly to instincts latent in every female heart. No sooner did she find the helpless little being in her arms, than Matilda's heart softened towards it. In its sleep, it uttered a slight moan; and she raised its soft cheek to her own, to soothe it with caresses. It folded its tiny hands upon its bosom as she bent over it, and the grace of its infantine movements excited her admiration. "Poor little creature!" was her silent reflection. "It is now motherless. Its parents have cast it off for ever. I should be unpardonable not to do my best towards supplying their place."

The nurse kept coming and going between the two rooms; bustling about and setting the place to order, without offering to relieve her of her burden. She contented herself with placing a cushion under Lady Norman's foot, commending her skill as a nurse, and applauding the tranquillity of the babe, who had slept quietly from the moment of quitting Paris, with-

out uttering a single cry to endanger discovery.

"Not a soul knows yet of our arrival," said Madame Gervais, making herself as familiarly at home in Matilda's room as if she had lived there all her days. "The servants will conclude, by-and-bye, that Ghita has been attending on us through the night. But we want no one. The fewer prying people admitted into these rooms the better. For a week to come, milédi will content herself with my attendance and that of monsieur. She will laugh at my awkwardness; but what then? Poor old Gervais is accustomed to be laughed at! Poor old Gervais is the best of lady's maids to a little gentleman six hours old; but she does not pretend to be a fitting attendant for a beautiful lady, like milédi."

The good-humoured garrulity of the old dame placed Matilda at her ease. After the cool silence of Ghita, the familiarity of Madame Gervais was a relief. She talked too incessantly to allow Lady Norman a moment for reflection; and claimed her services for the child as frankly and cordially

as if she really imagined her to be its mother.

The wet-nurse did not make her appearance so soon as was expected; and Matilda found herself growing as uneasy as Madame Gervais. The little creature seemed pining for food. She fancied it might suffer seriously by the delay; and kept hushing it off to sleep upon her bosom, while the nurse, who had taken authoritative possession of the supposed sick chamber, dispatched Ghita to the lodge to make inquiries.

"We will not render your penance longer than needful," said Madame Gervais, watching with satisfaction the progress her little charge was making in the affections of its beautiful nurse. "The shutters closed for two days, and your chamber kept quiet for a week, will satisfy the servants. After that, you can take your walks and drives as usual; leaving all further care of the little fellow to me and his nurse. I wish we

had her here, by this time; for the boy is getting sadly cold and weak. There! he does not look so frightful now!" continued Madame Gervais, as Matilda, alarmed by her lamentations, raised it closer to her bosom to preserve warmth in its little frame. And so successful had been her manœuvres, that

already Lady Norman was interested in its behalf.

"People not used to the sight of young children are no great judges of such matters," resumed the nurse. "But I, who have a couple of hundred such little creatures in my arms in the course of a year, can assure you that this is a most promising babe. I'd stake my life he'll grow up a beauty; and what's more, I'd stake my life that, before the year's up, you'll be most as fond of it as if 'twas your own. I'm experienced in such matters, dear lady; and 'tis written in your face that you were born to be doatingly fond of children. Monsieur chose this boy out of several, because of its fairness. He wished it to be fair, that it might resemble miledi in complexion!"

By this impromptu piece of flattery, Madame Gervais completed her triumph! All suspicion was gradually dissipated from the mind of Lady Norman. The maligner who accused her of being a dupe knew not, perhaps, to what extent she had been trusted by her husband. Having locked up the slip of writing in her desk and resolved to make no allusion on the subject to Sir Richard, she gave all her attention to her

nursling.

Installed in full splendour after the arrival of his nurse, the contented child, sleeping in his magnificent cradle, looked truly the heir of Selwood: and Matilda having seen the new comers comfortably established, disposed herself to take a few hours' rest in the adjoining chamber. Her sleep was no longer disturbed by the painful visions of the preceding night. It was late when she woke, roused, perhaps, at last by the officious-

ness of the nurse, who had crept tiptoe into the room.

"Well, to be sure! I hope we have rested soundly!" cried Madame Gervais, drawing aside the curtains, in obedience to Matilda's commands. "Fresh as a rose, too! A very different face from those of the poor suffering creatures I am in the habit of attending! Ah! your ladyship is truly in luck to have all the comfort and satisfaction of a beautiful little boy, without fear, pain, doctor, or physic. What would some of my poor ladies give to become a mother on such easy terms! Shall I bring my little man to say good morning to his pretty mamma?"

And without waiting for a reply she fetched the sleeping infant, and laid it by Matilda's side; to make its own way to

that kind and gentle heart.

It was thus she found herself suddenly greeted by Sir Richard Norman. Though overwhelmed with delight at beholding his wife so rapidly reconciled to her position, he had too much tact to express either joy or gratitude; but took a seat calmly by her bedside, and waited till it was her pleasure to address him.

"I am puzzled at present what to call this young gentleman," said she, bending over the sleeping boy, to conceal her embarrassment. "What do you intend shall be his name?"

"Whatever pleases your fancy, my dear Matilda."

"Your own, then."

"No!" replied her husband, his voice slightly faltering. "I should be jealous to hear you apply that name in a tone of

endearment to any but myself."

"You will choose godfathers for him; and etiquette requires, I believe, that they should decide the point," said Matilda, recollecting with shame the offer made by old Cruttenden to enrich and give his name to her expected child.

"Our good friend Guerchant has undertaken the office," replied Sir Richard. "And I was thinking of writing to Ireland, to Mandeville, to become the other."

"I fear," said Matilda, with a deep blush, "that my father will be greatly mortified unless solicited to become one of the sponsors."

"Impossible!" cried Norman. "I could not reconcile it to myself, dearest, to accept the kindness and liberality of your

family, for one so devoid of claims upon them."

"Under all the circumstances, there must be many things to which we shall find it difficult to reconcile ourselves," Lady Norman. "But we can do no less than place the little fellow wholly and absolutely in the light of our child. And it would be cruel to debar my father from a happiness and honour,

which cannot be withheld without offence.'

"It is not for me to deny a request of yours," replied Sir Richard. "But as, according to the laws of France, this boy must be registered at the Mairie within three days of his birth, not only as the offspring of 'Sir Richard Norman and Matilda Maule his wife,' but explicitly by his Christian name, it will be as well to have him baptized this evening by the cure of St. Sylvain, by the name of 'Walter Norman;' which is at once that of the admiral and of one of my immediate ancestors,

and renders our patronymic rightfully his own."
"With all my heart," replied Matilda. "I have no doubt
Master Walter will do honour to his name. I beg his pardon
for calling him a fright this morning, before I had obtained a full view of his august person; for I now think him a very fine little fellow," said she, imprinting a kiss on his forehead; "and Madame Gervais promises that his beauty shall eclipse that of

my little friend of the Champs Elysées."

There was something in the allusion not altogether satis-

factory to Sir Richard. Delighted as he was to find Matildaconferring her good offices on the little stranger, he was silent when she concluded her observations by this reference to the Normans.

At that moment, Madame Gervais, stealing in with a significant smile, informed them that Madame Guerchant was in the next room, waiting for permission to pay her compliments to "Paccouchée." "Was she to be admitted?"

"By all means!" cried Sir Richard, allowing no time for Matilda to demur. "You can ask her to become the boy's godmother, with the admiral, which will remove all difficulties. Rather too blooming for an invalid!" he continued, pressing Matilda's hand, as it smoothed down the infant's robe, while Madame Gervais went to usher in the future godmother. "However, you look as happy and maternal as could be desired. Have no fears on that account."

"Fie. fie!" was the hasty adjuration of the good Madame Guerchant, on finding Matilda engaged in cheerful conversation in a room into which the April sun was brightly shining.

"Do you mean to kill yourself with these exertions? My best congratulations to you, chère milédi, and a hearty welcome to your little son. A boy, you see, as I prognosticated, and everything going on as well as possible. Since you will have daylight in your room, I must be allowed a peep at your child. Ha! the living image of Sir Richard! His forehead exactly, exactly the dimple on the chin! A noble boy,—a beautiful Worthy to be born a Frenchman, and a subject of our child. beloved emperor!"

Without noticing the confusion into which her remarks had thrown the Normans, she embraced the boy, dismissed the nurse, and ran on to the news of the day, the questions before the Chamber, the audiences given the preceding night by the emperor; in the midst of which, Matilda discovered, from some accidental expression, that Norman had not, according to his assertion, dined the day before with Admiral Guerchant. Why had he deceived her? On that trivial point, at least, she had been unquestionably "a dupe!" All her misgivings recurred with the conviction.

Meanwhile, Sir Richard had quitted the room, to afford leisure to Matilda for her request concerning the sponsorship; and amid the gossip that ensued between Madame Gervais and the mother and grandmother of seven-and-twenty living descendants, Lady Norman had a moment's respite for conjecture and mortification.

Her husband, however, was luckily as unconscious of the discovery she had made, as of the warning she had received. Satisfied that all difficulties were overcome, that his deep-laid plans had fully succeeded, that all was upon velvet, that he was the happiest of the human race, he retired to his morningroom to complete a few trifling announcements suggested to him by Matilda. As he sat down to his writing-table, in the highest spirits, a smile of triumph stole over his handsome

"After all," murmured he, as he placed two letters on the desk before him, "my very cares turn to blessings, and my thorns send forth blossoms. I am the most fortunate man on earth. Even the annoyance of having to acquaint old Maule of the existence of a grandson, is fully compensated by the delight of being able to announce to those insupportable people at Grovepark, per favour of the Times and Morning Post, the birth of my son and heir!"

As he spoke, he prepared to seal the two epistles destined to convey to the two anxious families such opposite emotions of joy and grief. But lo! as he stood before the taper, with the seal, bearing the aristocratic blazon of the Normans ready in his hand to attest the transmission of a fraud, the library door was thrown open, and a servant entered announcing "the Abbé

O'Donnel!"

CHAPTER XV.

You undergo too strict a paradox, Striving to make an ugly deed look fair. SHAKSPEARE.

It was somewhat more than four years after the occurrence of these events, that two travelling carriages, containing Sir Richard Norman and his family, drove through the village of

Selwood, on their return to the manor.

Summer was in its prime. Peace and plenty were in the land; and the tenants of the long-absent family, rejoicing in the prospect of renewed benefactions and hospitalities, prepared to greet them with the warmest welcome; and above all, to afford a triumphal inauguration to the young heir of Selwood. A rustic arch was erected at the entrance of the village, covered with laurels interspersed with roses, and blazing with gaudy flags and gold-leaf; while a far more beautiful embellishment was prepared by the hands of nature, in the bloom of the numerous little gardens encompassing the humble tenements lining the road, and in the verdure of the magnificent woods of Selwood, which formed a noble embankment in the back-

ground.

Though secretly embarrassed by the ill-timed enthusiasm of his tenantry, Sir Richard could not but feel gratified, when, on reaching the outskirts of his domain, he was saluted by hearty cheers; while a dense mob of farmers and labouring men assembled round the carriage, with cries of "God bless you !"—
"Long life to the old family!"—"Good luck to our young landlord!"—"Success to the heir of Selwood!"—At the last stage, he caused little Walter to be removed from the second carriage to his own; and now presented the noble-looking child to the multitude, whose acclamations might have daunted the courage of a less spirited boy. As if conscious of his consequence, how-ever, the child replied to their cheers by waving his little hat; and on Sir Richard requiring them from the carriage-window to desist from their attempt to take off the horses and drag the carriage up the hill to the manor, Walter Norman offered his little hand to be shaken by the foremost of the crowd, with all the affability of a prince. The travellers being at length per-mitted to proceed on their journey, the villagers of Selwood, ere they dispersed to their habitations for the enjoyment of their holiday, assembled in high court of rustic parliament at the stocks (which in old-fashioned villages constitute the seat of government, as the sight of a gibbet is supposed to announce the

existence of civilization), and decreed that Sir Richard had brought back from foreign parts a far more cheerful face than he took away; and that my lady had brought back a son and heir

bidding fair to be an honour to the family.

They admitted, however, that this was all the improvement visible in "my lady." Their unprejudiced eyes quickly discerned that a shade was upon her brow; that her cheek was paler than of old, her brow more pensive. Though still in the prime of youth, a blight was upon her cheek, a blight engen-

dered by unceasing self-reproach.

Not all the changes and diversions they had witnessed in their travels had sufficed to drive her deep-seated grief from the heart of Lady Norman. Having quitted Paris as soon as the expiration of the hundred days brought back the allied armies, and in their train the coterie of fashionable English so distasteful to Sir Richard, they had visited every remarkable country in Europe; had passed a winter in Rome, another in Vienna, and a third in Berlin; wandering, during the intervening summers, among the scenery of the Apennines, the Pyrennees, the Jura, and the miniature Switzerland of Saxony. Matilda had acquired new impressions, new languages, new friends. But the one still-enduring affliction weighed heavily more than ever on her heart.

For it was of a nature that forbad its being lessened by participation. Sir Richard Norman had not only bound her by solemn pledges never to afford a hint upon the subject to living mortal, but had interdicted all further reference to it, as regarded himself. He seemed desirous to forget what had occurred. And Matilda sometimes almost fancied he had succeeded; so rapturous was the delight he took in the progress and promise of his heir; so intense the affection with which he

regarded the adopted child!

Lady Norman herself dearly loved the boy. It would have been impossible to withhold her fondness from a creature so deeply attached to herself. Yet in her fondest caresses, there mingled a pang of bitterness. There was always a reserve in her attachment. She could never, at any moment, forget that she beheld in Walter the evidence of unexpiated error, the living proof of an enormous breach of integrity. Of late, indeed, a new care had arisen in her mind connected with his mysterious adoption; but too recently to be accountable for the sadness which defaced the bloom of her bright and beautiful youth.

Meanwhile, the travellers were installed once more under the roof of the Manor; and never had the place appeared to such advantage in the eyes of Sir Richard Norman. The depth and richness of English verdure clothing the park and woodlands, were not more refreshing to his eye than the completeness and elegance of the house. Among the noble palaces and princely

mansions of the continent, he had seen nothing so thoroughly adapted to the convenience of life. There were all the attributes of the palace; pictures, statues, a fine library, a noble observatory. But there was also the snug book-room, the well-warmed restibule and staircase, the commodious chambers and airy dressing-rooms, exclusively characteristic of the English home.

Already, Walter was coursing over the close-shaven velvet lawn the poor infirm spaniel, which by its frolics seemed to recognize its habitation of old; while Matilda stood on the threshold of the conservatory opening from the saloon, gazing upon the fine exotics which had attained such growth during her absence; convinced that, though the plants and flowers of southern climates may be more glowing and luxuriant, in no country are they so intimately brought home to domestic enjoy-

ment as in England.

Great improvements had been achieved in the place during their absence. A large portion of their income, economized on the continent, had enabled Sir Richard to diversify the park with plantations, and the extension of a fine stream of water; while the interior of the house was adorned with the noble collection of objects of art he had gradually amassed abroad. The chef-d'œuvre of the improvements, however, was a dressing-room destined for Matilda; which opened through a trellised balcony to the coved roof of the conservatory, concealed by a screen of exotics. Lined with alternate panels of Florentine, Mosaic, and Venetian glass, the intervening draperies were of Lyons silk of the palest fawn colour. No gilding,—no finery,—no starry ceiling, or glittering cornices. The tables, carved from blocks of the purest white marble, had been despatched straight from Carrara; and an exquisite statue of Silence, by Bartolini, graced the pedestal in the alcove.

Conducted in triumph by her husband to this temple of luxury, Matilda knew not whether most to applaud the taste of its decorations, or the consideration which had presided over their selection. All alienation of feeling had long ceased between Sir Richard and herself. So complete was their re-union, that it seemed scarcely explicable how coldness or mistrust should ever have sprung up between them; and Matilda felt grateful to him for having effaced, by this preparation of a new chamber for her use, all recollection of the

painful hours of her last sojourn at Selwood Manor,

All was sunshine now.—The house seemed to have lost its former cheerless look; and one at least of its inhabitants had overcome since last he crossed its threshold, the only unsatisfactory circumstance connected with the spot. Sir Richard no longer feared that the inheritance he took so much pleasure in adorning, would pass to the enjoyment of an enemy!

"I like this room; I will have this room for my own. I will come and live in this pretty room with mamma!" cried little

Walter, following Sir Richard and Lady Norman to their retreat.

"There is no room for you here, sir, unless, indeed, you mean to deprive me of mine," said Sir Richard, patting the wayward little fellow on the head with doting tondness:

"May I turn him out, mamma?" persisted the child. "I

should so much like to be with you here, all to ourselves!"

"Upon my word, you have a good notion of making yourself comfortable!" resumed Sir Richard; who could never see a fault in Walter. "But I don't intend to be deposed before my time. Content yourself with your nursery."
"Where is his nursery?" demanded Matilda.

"At some distance, in the eastern wing. The rooms that were mine in my childhood," replied Norman, carelessly. "I sent orders to have them refurnished, and have no doubt all is very comfortable. The great advantage is, that being so far off, you need not be troubled with him more than you like."
"But I never trouble her! Do I mamma?" cried Walter,

sturdy in the assertion of his rights. "I won't be sent away from her. I won't stay in this place at all, if I may not remain

with my mamma.'

The exulting smile with which Sir Richard glanced towards his wife, plainly expressed—"Could a child of your own have loved you more dearly?" But he found no correspondent triumph in the eyes of his wife. He could almost fancy that hers were suffused with tears. Hastily consigning the boy to the care of his attendant, he invited her to saunter with him through the shrubberies till dinner-time. But Matilda pleaded fatigue. She was either overpowered by her journey, or by the emotion produced by her return to that long-forgotten home.

Her heart experienced the need of other consolations than rich furniture, or gay flower-gardens. She wanted cheering friends; comfortable counsel. There was a weight upon her mind; a weight she still lacked courage to confide to her husband. She would have given much for the solace of female companionship; for the presence of her surviving sister, of the motherly Mrs. Ravenscroft, the light-hearted Sophia. But during her absence the chain of her friendships and connections had been snapped asunder. Miss Ravenseroft was now the happy wife of Lord Selsdon, and settled with him at a family mansion in Shropshire, beyond reach of neighbourship with the Normans. And her proud mother was absent from Selwood Cottage, presiding over the events which had given a first grandchild to herself and her friends at Farleigh Castle.

Of the home of Matilda's childhood, scarcely a trace remained. Upon the marriage of his daughter Elizabeth with a rich Liver-pool merchant, old Maule had found it impossible to confront, unsupported, the bickerings and twittings of his partner. His health being impaired by a paralytic seizure which disabled

to press unencouraged pretensions to her hand. Lady Emily's baffled instincts had found an aim in teaching the young ideas of Farleigh village how to shoot; and, lacking the softening partialities of motherly nature, her preceptorship in Sunday schools and daily classes, rendered her arbitrary and dictatorial. But if no longer a gentle graceful girl, she was a woman of sense and good-breeding; and as such, was duly conscious of the acquisition secured to her society by the return of Matilda.
"Were you not surprised at my brother's marriage?" she inquired, at her first solitary visit to Selwood Manor.

"More pleased than surprised," replied Lady Norman. "From the first, I thought it a likely thing to happen. Two young people living in such near neighbourhood, on such friendly

terms."

"The very reason which prevented my anticipating anything of the kind! Affairs of that description so seldom occur in a straightforward, matter-of-fact way. George used to come down from town, raving about Lady Emmeline this, or Lady Helena the other, and seemed to take very little notice of Sophy."

He did not talk much of her, perhaps."

"He was afraid, it seems, that my father and mother might expect him to make what is called a better match."
"They had certainly a right to look for rank and fortune for Lord Selsdon."

"I don't agree with you, dear Lady Norman. No more did they. If the only son of an Earl with an unencumbered estate of thirty thousand a year, may not form a marriage of inclination, who on earth has a right to make a choice? Sophy was a gentlewoman with a gentlewoman's fortune and education; a match for any man in the kingdom,'

"She had qualities to render any man in the kingdom happy," "So much sweetness of temper, so much observed Matilda.

sprightliness of character."

"Yet with all these probabilities to bring the marriage about, it was very near failing of accomplishment," said Lady Emily. "My father and mother, who are the honestest people breathing, and without the slightest capacity for a manœuvre, determined to promote a connection on which they had set their hearts, and which would have settled itself without their interference. With this view, they persuaded Mrs. Ravensoroft to settle at Selwood; and soon after her arrival, the old lady having accidentally remarked to her lady-cousin that one of Lord Arden's daughters would make a suitable match for Selsdon, mamma put on a most significant face, and begged she would not mention such a thing, as she and Lord Farleigh had other views for their son.'

"Alluding to Sophia?" "Exactly. While Mrs. Rayenscroft, who has seen something of the world, instead of conceiving that any such downright allusion was intended, fancied mamma desirous of forewarning her against forming presumptuous expectations for her daughter. Meanwhile, Selsdon's attentions to Sophy commenced and prospered. You went abroad, instead of remaining to bring things to an issue between your young friends; and I have been too long accustomed to see young gentlemen devote their homage to young ladies without serious intentions, as they are called, to suppose that these daily meetings were producing other results than pleasant rides and walks."

"Instead of which, Lord Selsdon fell desperately in love?"

"And never told his love. While Sophy not only fell in love, but felt it her duty to acknowledge to her mother her growing partiality. More evil consequences from doing things in a straightforward way, in this world of zigzag and deceit. Mrs. Ravensoroft, terrified as she would have been on learning that the cottage was infected by cholers or typhus fever, saw no remedy but flight. After informing Sophia, from the authority of his own mother, that Lord Selsdon was an engaged man, she ordered fumigations—quitted home—carried her daughter off to Devonshire, on a visit to Captain Ravenseroft's relations, leaving us not even a message of courtesy or farewell. Imagine

poor Selsdon's despair, and my indignation!"

"I can better imagine that of Sophia. Well do I remember the desponding tone of the letters I received from her, which, as they explained nothing of these occurrences, I attributed to illness. I was so much alarmed as to address Mrs. Ravenscroft on the subject, who entreated me, in reply, to write cheerfully to Sophia, without giving her a suspicion of my uneasiness. Scarcely a month afterwards, a letter from Sophy, overflowing with love and rapture, acquainted me that her marriage was settled with the man of her choice—reminding me of a certain walk to a certain old forge, where we had met Lord Selsdon, and been escorted by him home—and assuring me that her prospects of happiness were confirmed by the generous concessions of Lord and Lady Farleigh."

"Ungrateful girl to say nothing of their amiable daughter," oried Lady Emily, almost in earnest, "when, if it had not been for my exertions, she might have spent a twelvementh longer at Torbay, listening to the pother of her uncles and aunts. It was I who, in compassion to Selsdon, managed to find out the address of the fugitives. I remember losing a whole morning shouting my cross-examination to old Mrs. Lynch, trying to detect, like a Bow-street officer, the haunts and connections of

the Ravenscroft side, of which mamma knew nothing."

"And the result was, that Lord Selsdon followed them—proposed—was accepted; and, as the story-books say, lived very happy ever afterwards?"

Too happy, I am sometimes inclined to think," replied

Lady Emily with a smile. "They are so dreadfully domestic, self-satisfied, and indolent, that I am sadly afraid of Selsdon's sinking into a jovial, good-humoured, selfish, agricultural-meeting, game-law, country-gentleman. My brother is growing fat and florid; noisy in company, and drowsy by his fireside."

"Fie, fie! This is exaggeration," said Matilda, smiling in her turn. "Sophia would never tolerate such a companion. With all her elegant pursuits, her music, her painting, her

modelling-"

"She has not given half an hour to any one of them from the date of the honeymoon!" interrupted Lady Emily. "Sophy is a person of cultivated tastes, rather than of cultivated understanding; and these required continual incitement to keep them alive. Selsdon cares nothing for music, unless the keybugle; or for drawing, unless sporting pictures, or Cruickshank's sketches. He likes his wife to dawdle about with him all the morning, ride with him all the afternoon, and work Berlin work while he snoozes after dinner. This labour of love, Sophia accomplishes to a miracle. I don't believe they have opened a book since they settled at Tuxwell Hall!"

"And now that this little girl has made her appearance—"
"There will be more dawdling and fondling than ever."

"In such contented idleness consists perhaps the truest happiness of life," sighed Matilda. "Lord and Lady Selsdon neglect no duties in thus devoting themselves to each other."

"Pardon me," replied Lady Emily, stoutly. "They owe something to society,—something to my father and mother,—something to the world. We can rarely get them to Farleigh Castle, or persuade Selsdon to give his attention to county business, or prepare himself for the coming session, when my uncle Henry is to vacate his seat in his favour. They scarcely ever leave home. They are sinking into obscurity. I assure you, Mrs. Ravenscroft is much the youngest and most agreeable of the party."

the party."

"These are early times. They have only been married two years," said Lady Norman. "Almost every marriage produces two years of domestic devotion. For my friend Sophy's sake, I wish I did not feel sure that Lord Selsdon will live to be an excellent member of Parliament,—to preside at public dinners,—head deputations,—present petitions,—frequent Boodle's, and distinguish his darling Sophy by the name of Lady

Selsdon."

"That would be carrying things further than I wish," cried Lady Emily, kindly. "I love my sister-in-law dearly; and should be grieved to see her neglected for the schemes of experimental philanthropy which, in these times, form such hosts of committees, associations, reports, bad husbands, and careless fathers. More especially as she has no taste for books to supply

the companionship she would have to dispense with. But I do wish that Selsdon's wife had been a woman more substantially educated, or more energetic in her nature; and I trust my dear Lady Norman will endeavour to rouse poor Sophy from her habits of indolence. And now that I have abused her to my heart's content, let me see your little boy. We are all curious to behold this prodigy, this little Louis XIV.—this long-looked-for-come-at-last young heir of Selwood Manor. I was suggesting to papa last night that, twenty years hence, he would make a charming match for little Louisa Farleigh. Do you give your consent?"

"You forget that Walter will be a Roman Catholic," said

Matilda, with a blushing face.

"Twenty years hence, I suspect, that will be a distinction without a difference," cried Lady Emily. "The Papists are becoming so moderate, and the Protestants so complying, that all memory of fire and fagots is extinguished. We shall have emancipation and a Catholic chancellor, without so much as finding it out. Ha! Sir Richard! Good morning! Delighted to see you back in Worcestershire. I am come to have a peep at your pictures, and statues, and son and heir; and to propose an alliance for him with my little niece. What say you? Will you accept a Lady Louisa Norman?"

Sir Richard replied with playful gallantry; caused the boy to be paraded before his future aunt, and parried Lady Emily's compliments on the dark hair and eyes of young Walter, as exactly resembling his own. For in spite of Madame Gervais's civilities, the adopted child bore a far stronger resemblance to

Sir Richard, than to the fair Saxon beauty of Matilda.

"I hope you will bring this little fellow with you next week to Farleigh Castle," continued Lady Emily. "My father and mother want you to pass a day or two with us, to do honour to the christening they are going to bestow upon their grandchild. It would be a delightful surprise for my sister-in-law to find

Lady Norman staying in the house."

To Matilda's great vexation, this cordial invitation was accepted by her husband; and long after Lady Emily's departure, she sat musing upon the necessity of an explanation with her husband, ere she encountered the scrutiny of the large party of her own sex about to be assembled at Farleigh Castle.

CHAPTER XVI.

Les choses que nous désirons vivement n'arrivent pas ; ou, si elles arrivent, ce n'est ni dans le temps ni dans l'occasion où elles nous auraient fait un extrême plaisir.-LA BRUYERE.

"I HAVE good news for you, Sophy," said Lady Emily to her pretty sister-in-law, after Lady Selsdon had received the salutations of the family party, and exhibited the charms of her baby to its admiring relatives. "The Normans have arrived at Selwood, and will be here to-morrow.

"Lady Norman here to-morrow? That is indeed a delightful surprise!" cried Lady Selsdon. "How I long to see her

boy, and show her my little girl!"

Disgraceful !-- to think of nothing but your rival nurseries in meeting a friend from whom you have been three years separated!" cried Lady Emily.

"What is this about Lady Norman?" inquired Lady Arthur D-, who, among other connections of the Farleigh family, was staying in the house.

"That she is come back from Italy looking beautiful as ever,

and joins our little circle to-morrow.

"I have seen or heard nothing of her since we parted four years ago, at Paris, in the midst of the Bonaparte panic," observed Lady Arthur. "She was a pretty, gentle creature. We used to like her amazingly. And it tous amasingly, for we were as jealous as possible of her success. The French swore that there was nothing like Lady Norman."

"There is nothing like her," said Lady Selsdon, with enthusiasm. "I never saw a person so devoid of selfishness or

pretension.

"No merit of hers, my dear!" observed Lady Arthur. "It all arises from living with that savage husband. Show me the house in England wide enough to contain Sir Richard Norman's selfishness and pretension, in company with those of any other person. She has never had room to think of herself;

ergo, her virtues are of her husband's creation."

"You speak of the Sir Richard of other days," replied Lady
Emily. "You won't know your savage when you see him
again. Bruin has learned to dance. I assure you he is come

home as courteous as Chesterfield.'

"I must write word of that to Lady Dawlish. How Noel used to hate him in Paris! Noel used to swear to the French that he was no Englishman, but that he had been American Chargé d'Affaires to the court of Dublin.'

"I should not have fancied Sir Richard Norman a man to be

trifled with," said Lady Selsdon, calmly.

"You might as well expect the summit of Plinlimmon to know that boys are playing marbles at its base, as for Sir Richard to suspect that people are presuming to make game of him. In those days, he used to live three thousand miles above the level of the vulgar earth."

"I prophesy that, to-morrow, you will pronounce him one of the most agreeable men upon the surface of it," said her cousin.

"And what has wrought this wonderful transformation?"

"Travel. The polish which friction impresses on the rolling

stone.

"More likely the birth of his son and heir," said Mrs. Ravenscroft, who now entered the room, after escorting her little grandchild to its quarters. "Sir Richard was soured by the prospect of seeing his entailed estates descend to a distant branch of the family."
"Not exactly of seeing it," said Lady Emily, a stickler for

verbal accuracy.

"By the way—yes; I recollect now," cried Lady Arthur,

"Lady Catherine O'Flaherty was stupid enough to marry the
man who was to have been his heir. They made sure of coming into the property; when lo! one fine day Lady Dawlish brought news that there was a little Shiloh on the road; and we had hysterics, and Eau de Cologne for the rest of the day. A fainting fit from Lady Catherine is no laughing mat-ter. Poor Noel's shoulder was sprained for a month afterwards. He was obliged to go through a course of vapour baths."

"Then pray do not risk bringing on a new attack by informing her that young Norman is the most promising little fellow in the world," said Lady Emily.

"That was another of poor Lady Catherine's vagaries!" observed Lady Arthur, gradually reviving her reminiscences "Lady Catherine would have it that the Normans were going to impose a supposititious child upon the family. She insisted that Sir Richard and his wife lived on the most disunited terms; and so far moved the spirit of Lady Dawlish in compassion, that she dragged me down, one day, on a voyage of discovery, to an old château the Normans inhabited near Charenton, where we deserved to have been detained."

"And what did you find there?"
"A stately eld barrack of a house, with antechambers and Salles des gardes, to prove that the French nobility who now live like soamps, once lived like princes; and a Caliban of a brother of Lady Norman's, who myladyed us all round, bit his bread while see bit our lips, and ate omelette soufflée with a sharp-pointed knife!"

"The greater the merit of Lady Norman," interposed Lady

Farleigh, angrily, "who, having such vulgar relations, is so perfectly well-bred. We are very fond of Lady Norman in this house. You recollect, Clara, that I gave her letters of

introduction to you in Paris?

"And I did them honour by presenting her to all my friends. She would have got on wonderfully in society, but for the little stories set afloat by Lady Catherine respecting her parvenuism, and Sir Richard's love affairs with some low wretch or other, one of Napoleon's duchesses or princesses, or something of that kind. I never understood the story."

"No occasion, then, to renew the effort," said Lady Farleigh, displeased at her niece's levity. "Nothing worthy attention is

likely to proceed from Lady Catherine Norman."
"Tell not that in Gath, my dear madam," exclaimed the giddy Lady Arthur. "You lawless people who leave London at midsummer, and know nothing of its thrones and dominions, have very little notion of Lady Catherine's present importance. Lady Catherine is great with the greatest—has a Pythoness's tripod within the sanctuary of the Carlton Temple—and dispenses ribands and pensions, by influencing some one who influences the other one. The French soldiers, you know, designate Napoleon as 'Pautre,'—a phrase we have adopted to specify our prince and master."

"May I inquire, my dear, whom you mean by we?" inquired

Lady Farleigh, gravely.
""We crowned heads, as a certain serene highness said to the Emperor Alexander; by WE, I mean the world, society, the

people one lives with!"

"Then your indefinite pronoun, my dear Clara, can never be made to infer yourself and mamma," observed Lady Emily; " for your associates and hers are as opposite as the red and white chessmen on a board."

"Since you are so pragmatical, then, I mean Lady Dawlish's

set," persisted Lady Arthur.
"I guessed as much," said Lady Farleigh. "Lady Dawlish's set are, I admit, justified in worshipping Lady Catherine; for their idol was wrought with the labour of their hands. But I hope you do not expect independent people to bow down to the mere agent of the party in power?"

"I expect nothing just now, except those horrid men home from rabbit-shooting," said Lady Arthur, weary of the discus-sion. "Lord Selsdon pretended to set off after them; and instead of bringing them home, seems to have led them deeper into mischief. Now, pray don't any of you take up his defence, or I shall begin to suspect they are off to Malvern or Chelten-

Meanwhile, even though the hour had struck for her visit to Farleigh Castle, Matilda had attempted no explanation with

her husband!

Sir Richard was in the highest spirits. He found Selwood improved during his absence beyond his expectations. There was no fear of Mr. Maule renewing his annual visits to the Manor; and as to Tom Cruttenden, they need take no further note of his existence. Selwood Cottage was almost as good as uninhabited, so long and frequent were Mrs. Ravenscroft's visits to Tuxwell Park; while the Abbé O'Donnel was safe, for the remainder of his days, in the Rue des Fossés St. Victor. Sir Richard was thus secure from those domestic intru-sions which he held in abhorrence. He now lived as happily with Matilda as if the current of his true love had invariably run smooth as glass; and both experienced daily-increasing joy and pride in the promising little heir of Selwood. Not a shadow of care remained upon his brow; and Matilda trembled at the idea of arresting on his lips the rash invocation of "Soul, take thine ease," and substituting a solemn invitation to lasting remorse!

Nevertheless, the effort must be made. A glance at herself in the glass on the day appointed for her visit to Farleigh Castle, apprised her of the probability that some gratulatory remark from her old friends Lady Farleigh or Mrs. Ravenscroft might lead to discovery; and arming herself with courage, she resolved to anticipate the startling announcement. She happened to enter the breakfast-room just as Walter was brandishing the bough of a beautiful exotic, which he had torn down in

the conservatory.

"Sad complaints of this young gentleman from Anderson and the gardeners!" observed Sir Richard, gazing fondly upon the boy and his prize, as if in admiration of such precocity of mischief.

"But why not choose your boughs in the shrubbery, Walter?" demanded Lady Norman. "You would find branches there to flog your horse as well. Why prefer breaking those in the con-

servatory?"

"Because the servants ordered me not; and I don't choose

to be ordered by anybody but you or papa!"
"There's a brave spirit!" cried Sir Richard Norman, patting his round white shoulder, as the child trotted past on his

wooden nag.
"Poor fellow! he wants companions here," said Matilda, busying herself with the breakfast-cups, to conceal her changes of countenance. "But he may soon have one!"
"Not very soon. It will be some time before Selsdon's chil-

dren are old enough to amuse him."

"I did not allude to Lord Selsdon's family," added Matilda, with increasing confusion. "I was anticipating the possibility of his having a brother of his own."

"God forbid!" ejaculated Sir Richard, evidently without

conjecturing the drift of her remarks.

"Why God forbid?" inquired Lady Norman. "Surely our hasty adoption need not so harden our hearts as to render us insensible to the happiness of having children of our own?"

"To our disappointment on that score," said Sir Richard, still misapprehending her, "I have so long made up my mind,

that it seems useless to recur to it."

"But the disappointment exists no longer," said Matilda,

firmly. "In three months I shall be a mother."

Sir Richard Norman started from his chair; and to Matilda's heartfelt delight she perceived that his first movement was a movement of joy. An expression of rapturous self-gratulation brightened his features. But, alas! it vanished as it came; vanished, to give place to a death-like paleness, and gestures

of a deep despair.

"I am punished as I deserve!" cried he, after a heavy pause, during which tears gathered under his syclids; "since, instead of offering you at this moment my thanks and blessings, I am forced to sue for pardon and pity! Matilda, can you forgive me for having robbed your child of his birthright? Come hither, boy!" cried he, suddenly seizing little Walter in the midst of his pastimes, and impelling him towards Lady Norman. "Down on your knees, and ask forgiveness with me of this ange!"

"She is not an angel; she is my own dear mamma," cried the little fellow, throwing his arms round Matilda's neck, and imprinting an affectionate kiss upon her face, that said more in his favour than worlds of studied supplications. "And mamma don't choose me to kneel for pardon to any but God Almighty. Do you?" said he, addressing Matilda with another eloquent

kiss.

"Never!" she replied. "But you must thank Him that you are going to have a little brother, Walter. Shall you not be fond of a little brother?"

"That I shall, if you don't love it better than you love me,"

cried the child.

"I promise you that I will not," replied Lady Norman, addressing Sir Richard through the medium of the child. "I will love no little boy better than you, Walter, because you were my first and dearest. But you must be very kind to your little brother, and protect him for my sake."

It was useless to continue her reassurances to the agitated man. Unable to overcome his thick-coming emotions, he rose

and quitted the room.

A few hours afterwards, and Matilda and her son were in the midst of the gay coterie at Farleigh Castle. Replying to the questions of a host of strangers with equal spirit and intelligence, young Norman was soon pronounced to be all that Lady mily had described him. Yet these praises afforded little gratification to those they purported to please. Other feelings

were burning on the cheek of Matilda; and already, Sir Richard seemed to regard the little foundling with disgust. Lady Norman saw distinctly that her revelations had effected a total revolution in the feelings of her husband; and unluckily, his deportment was intimately regulated by his feelings. Instead of the joyous, cheery, courteous man announced by Lady Emily to Sophy and Lady Arthur, he had relapsed into the moroseness of former years. His mind was preoccupied. He had not a word to offer in conversation. No man recently arrived from the continent, after frequenting in its various countries, their most brilliant and distinguished society, ever found so little to say for the edification of a dinnertable; and Lord Selsdon, whose talk was of—

Guns, bugies, double-barrels, dogs, and thunder,

was far more companionable. Even Lord Arthur D., whose colloquial efforts consisted in a smile occasionally interpolated into the discourse of strangers, or a yawn occasionally interpolated into that of his wife, was a less heavy weight on the oircle than the man whose severe countenance and accusing ailence,

appeared to tax them with frivolity.

Little did good Lord Farleigh dream, as he dilated to his long-absent neighbour upon the road-bills that had passed during his residence abroad, to form highways where nothing was ever likely to pass in their thinly-populated district, how far away from Worcestershire were the thoughts of his companion! Little did Lord Selsdon imagine, when he cross-questioned him concerning the game-laws, beagles, and roebucks of France, what anguish of spirit prompted his vague and inaccurate replies! Little did Lady Arthur D. conjecture that while he listened without reply to her intelligence that "Lady Catherine Norman's boy, having lost all his beauty, would bear no comparison with his little cousin Walter," that the teeth of the smiling man were grinding with agony!

Every ordinary word seemed to borrow significance in his ears. He kept fancying that those who addressed him had other meaning than they pretended; that they discerned the plague-spot upon his soul, and derided his unavailing

repentance.

Already, certain comments of the little boy had spread among Matilda's friends the news of her position, and all were ready with congratulations. The elder matrons prognosticated that now she had commenced a family, she would have as many sons and daughters as queen Hecuba; while Lady Arthur incantiously exclaimed, and so loud as to be overheard by Sir Richard Norman, "Well, I am glad you are likely to have more children. That puts an end at once to the scandalous rumours circulated by Lady Catherine Norman."

"What rumours?" inquired Matilda, in a faltering voice, feeling it impossible to pass over the remark in presence of so many witnesses.

"That your eldest boy was a supposititious child, adopted to

defraud her husband of the Selwood estates.

"Lady Catherine Norman is capable of saying anything gross and insulting!" observed Lady Farleigh, provoked at

Lady Arthur's indiscretion.

"Who knows, my dear Sophy," cried Lady Emily, anxious to laugh off the evident distress of Matilda, "perhaps some malicious person will one day or other accuse you and Selsdon of having stolen little Louisa from the workhouse at Tuxwell, to supersede me in my claim to a portion of the Farleigh property!—"

"But, my dearest Lady Norman, how pale you are growing!" interrupted Lady Selsdon, fixing her eyes upon her friend. "You are over-fatigued. You have not yet recovered the effort of your journey. Mamma, make room for Lady Norman beside that open window. The heat of the room, or the scent of that datura has overpowered her. Sir Richard, pray come this way a moment. I fear Lady Norman is ill!"

"Matilda!" cried her husband, rushing forward to receive

her into his arms.

But Matilda heard him not. She had fallen into a state of insensibility.

CHAPTER XVII.

In our pursuit of the things of this world, we prevent enjoyment by anticipation, and eat out the heart and sweetness of our pleasures, by too much forethought of them.—TILLOTSON.

"My dearest Matilda, this will never do!" cried Sir Richard. when at length he found himself alone with his wife. "Every moment we are on the point of betraying ourselves. In taking the course I rashly adopted with regard to that unfortunate boy. I fancied I had anticipated all contingencies, and armed myself against their influence. I had not thought of the only one capable of enlisting our own feelings against us! I had

foreseen all else; but never dreamed that the impulses of parental affection would defy our self-government."

"They will not, they shall not," replied Lady Norman.

"From this day, you shall have nothing to complain of. I will command myself. I will extinguish the very feelings requiring command.—Fear nothing.—My weakness this morning arose

solely from fatigue.

"And from fatigue it will arise again. You have much to go through, dearest wife. Impossible for you to answer for yourself, under such circumstances. At some moment of exhaustion or excitement, you will betray yourself and me."
"I will not. Our sensations are more under our control than

we choose to have it believed."

"At present you cannot decide on that point-"

"I can ;-for how could the business of the lower classes or the ceremonies of court proceed, were the sufferings incidenta

to my situation so overpowering?"

"The sufferings of other women are not enhanced by wounded sensibility. Though you so generously spare me, be assured that I appreciate what, for the last six months, must have been passing in your mind. We are miserable wretches, Matilda! But, miserable as we are, there is no need to magnify the evil by surrendering ourselves to its influence without a struggle. We must be careful that the world judge us less severely than we have reason to judge ourselves. We must take heed of every word that falls from our lips, every glance that escapes our eyes. We must fly from Selwood, where we are objects of constant examination. We must take refuge in the throng of London."

"Not now! Surely you will not require me to leave home again so soon?" faltered Lady Norman, dreading the effort.

"I wish you to be confined in town. You will have better attendance. You will be safe from espionage. You will be secure from the intrusions of these women!"

"But at such a time their presence would be a comfort, rather than an intrusion," pleaded Lady Norman.

"No comfort to me!" replied her husband. "Some unruarded expression would be sure to betray your inexperience. They would be sure to discover—"

"As you please!" interrupted Matilda, shrinking from even an allusion to her duplicity, "if you are of opinion that we shall be better in London, let us remove thither next

week.

And such was the intention she announced that evening, when questioned by her friends concerning her projects. As she had expected, all were loud in opposition. "London, in September, would be utterly deserted. Not a friend to cheer her, not an acquaintance to amuse. Lady Selsdon had done so well with country attendance, and country quiet. She would do much better, staying peaceably at Selwood Manor." Lady Farleigh promised that Sophy, who was to be her guest for the next six weeks, should constantly visit her friend; and Mrs. Ravenscroft assured her that she was going to spend the autumn at the cottage, and would watch over her as she had done over her daughter. But to all this, Matilda could only reply by admitting her anxiety to secure the attendance of London physicians.

"You are grown a great coward all of a sudden, my dear!" exclaimed Lady Arthur. "What makes you so much more frightened than you were three years ago? Have you anything on your conscience? I remember you persisted in being confined at that barrack of a château, with nothing but an old

woman to attend you.

"My experience then has rendered me more cautious."

"Why there you had a very fair chance of being seized and shut up in La Force! Yet not a step would you stir from the spot, even with the fear of Napoleon before your eyes." /

"I assure you my fear of the Worcestershire faculty is far more overpowering," said Lady Norman, attempting a smile. And this time, her plea of defence was fortunate; for it drew down a violent flourish from Lady Farleigh and Mrs. Ravenscroft in favour of their pet apothecary, which diverted the attention of Lady Arthur from all recurrence to the past. When next she addressed Matilda, it was to describe the horrors awaiting her in a London September; and the tirade was at length interrupted by Mrs. Ravenscroft with a petition that little Walter, instead of being hurried into the unwholesome atmosphere of London at a period when his mother would be incapable of attending to him, might be left under her charge at Selwood Cottage.

On the day following, the ceremony of christening Lord Selsdon's lovely infant filled the castle with rejoicing. The grandfather and two grandmothers acted as sponsors: the old servants of the household were arrayed in smiles to welcome this budding of a new generation of the family; and the noble guests wore their white ribbons with good grace, and quaffed "victorious Burgundy" to the health of little Louisa Farleigh.

But there was something in the solemnity that sunk deep into the mind of Lady Norman; something affecting in the family tenderness with which the little Christian was ushered into its new life, which strangely contrasted with the isolation awaiting her own. Little Walter's baptism had been hurried over, with the Guerchants only for respondents and witnesses; and it happened that this was the first time she had been present at such a ceremony according to the ritual of the Protestant Church. The solemn words entered into her soul. She thought of her unborn child; and trembled lest for it she should never hear unfolded that sacrament of grace. She thought of her unborn child; and felt conscious of her unworthiness to enjoy a mother's triumph over her peril.

"I shall die, and I have deserved to die," pondered Lady Norman; glancing from the venerable countenance of Lord Farleigh's chaplain, who with such touching emotion was procuncing the promises of the Gospel in favour of the infant whose father he had also presented at the baptismal fount, to the lace draperies of the little girl, arrayed in all the pride, pomp, and circumstance of a glorious christening-robe. "The holiest sanctity with which a woman is invested, ought to be upon me now. The purest screnity of conscience ought to be mine, at a moment when other women set their house in order; lest in their anguish they should be snatched away. But I,—sheuld I not survive the event,—must go down to the grave in the commission of sin; in the perpetration of a fraud such as, detected on the part of some poor uninstructed wretch, would consign him to a felon's chastisement. Were I of my husband's faith, I should not dare withhold this secret from the confessional; and my only impunity consists in the consistency of hypocrisy, which enables me to conceal it from the world."

The sadness of Lady Norman's countenance amid the general rejoicing did not pass unnoticed. But at such a period, excuses are readily found for low spirits; and her friends compassionating what they supposed to be her forebodings, decided that, with such evil presentiments, she did right to remove to London. It was a relief to all parties when Lady Norman returned to Selwood to prepare for her journey to town.

Matilda's distress was not, however, of a nature to be affected by change of scene. Home brought with it sorrows of its own. The very sight of Selwood was an accusation; for to Sir Richard's desire to estrange the property from the Grove Park family, did she attribute the deed so deeply repented. His attentions to her were now unceasing. But whenever he drove her in his low phaeton through the woodlands, by way of gentle exercise, she was forced to exert herself to talk, lest he should attribute her reverie to contemplation of the injury inflicted upon her child, by the alienation of their princely possessions. Even when he found her ruminating in her boudoir, tranquil for a time, and simply enjoying its luxury, she would start up on his approach, and affect to busy herself in some active pursuit; lest he should suppose her to be struggling with the suggestions of jealous envy of the superseder of her child.

The time approached for their removal to town. Matilda had not yet hazarded a request that her family might be invited to the Manor, previous to her departure. Her duty suggested that she ought to seek a blessing from the father from whom she had been three years separated; while her inclinations prompted a renewal of intercourse with the sister, whose letters, during her sojourn on the continent, announced that the intelligent girl had progressed into a highminded woman. The ten years which divided Lady Norman, at thirty-one, from Mrs. Avesford, formed a far different barrier from that which, at seventeen, had divided Matilda Maule from little Lizzy; and she longed to embrace as a friend the sister she had quitted as a plaything.

But when the proposal was at length ventured, Sir Richard

looked black and negative.

"It is surely not a moment for your introduction to strangers," said he. "You cannot invite the Avesfords here without extending your hospitality to Mr. John Maule and his wife, with whom it appears your father is on a visit. This new brother and sister-in-law will be too much for you. They may be noisy, intrusive, and disagreeable. Even were they all you can desire, they must still call upon you for exertions to which you are unequal."

"I confess I long to see my father and sister again!" remon-

strated Matilda.

"If you could see them alone. But the flurry and bustle of a large family party at such a time-

"They would be but five. And I promise you not to over-

exert myself."
"As you please," replied Norman, fractionaly. "Bring down the whole family in judgment upon me, if you find it agreeable. It only needs old Cruttenden and his protégé to make the plan perfect.'

"I do not ask that," sighed Matilda. "And were we desirous of their company, the pressure of their immense business

prevents their quitting home."

"Since these people are to come," resumed Sir Richard, "the

sooner the better. If the hazard must be incurred, do not post-pone it till, by hurrying the event, it insures the further

mischief of preventing our journey to London."

But Matilda had already determined against bringing those who were likely to be ungraciously received, into contact with her husband; and on the following day, instead of obeying his injunctions by despatching letters of invitation, she informed him that, on consideration, she thought it better to defer the promised party till her return from town. "Her father and sister would be better pleased to see the baby, as well as herself."

"Mark the accomplishment of my prophecy!" observed Sir Richard. "Already, you speak of this promised child as your own—your only. Already, you seem to admit that Walter has no claim to their interest. It is this which made me dread an interview with your family. However well you may feign with

indifferent persons, when once your heart is opened, dearest Matilda, you must inevitably betray yourself."
"My heart is not often opened," sighed Matilda, with irrepressible bitterness, as she reflected how cruelly her affectionate nature had been blighted by the limits assigned to her inter-course with her friends and kindred. "But no matter. I will strive to perfect myself in my painful lesson, before I see my family. Later in the autumn, if I live, perhaps you will permit me to invite them."

The words "if I live" struck painfully upon the ear of Sir Richard Norman. Conscious of apparent harshness, but still without losing sight of the peremptory necessity for caution, he contented himself to pass for a monster rather than encourage an expansion of feeling on the part of Matilda, so fatal to the

prospects of both.

"I will write to Elizabeth from London, and surprise her with intelligence of my return to England and the approaching event," murmured Lady Norman, when she found herself alone. "As a married woman, she has probably become aware that a wife is not all powerful in her husband's establishment. May the discovery have brought with it events less direful than it

has entailed on her unfortunate sister!"

The day was now appointed for leaving Worcestershire. Matilda, on the eve of quitting Selwood, recalled to mind with a sigh the unforeseen incidents to which her last departure from home had been the precursor; and aggravated her regrets by evil inferences for the future. She paid a farewell visit to every favourite spot; to a flower-garden buried in the woods, which Sophy Ravenscroft and herself had planned during Sir Richard's absence in France; to a rustic fishing-house, where, during the two years succeeding her marriage, she had been accustomed to pass the summer evenings with her husband, enjoying the freshness of the surrounding waters. The damps

of the spot now struck chill upon her heart. Autumnal leaves were falling and disfiguring her forest garden. Everything around her partook of the gloomy influence of the hour. Even when, unknown to Norman, she betook herself to the village almshouses raised under her authority, to console her poor pensioners for her renewed absence by a secret benefaction, the terms of their blessings filled her mind with despondency. "God speed you safe through it, my lady! Heaven prosper you, as it did before, and send you another noble boy to be a playmate for Master Norman!"

It was on her return from this last expedition that Lady Norman, on her way through the park towards the house, found herself suddenly intercepted by Ghita, whose services, at her own desire, had for some time past been transferred from herself to the little boy. "They have done their utmost, Madam," said the woman,

resolutely, "to keep me from your presence. But the time draws near for your departure for town, and I must be heard."

"Who tries to keep you from my presence?" inquired Lady

Norman, struck by the woman's impetuosity.

"That Mrs. Ghrimes, whom I followed into your service, and whom you have taken back since you arrived here," persisted "She seems afraid I should attempt again to supersede her. The fool is mistaken. Not for any sum of gold would I relinquish my attendance upon my boy.

"Then what have you to say to me, Ghita?" demanded Lady

Norman, becoming somewhat alarmed.

"That you must take Master Walter and me to London with

"That cannot be. It is settled that you are to remain here. You will take Master Norman, every day after breakfast, to the lady who resides at the white house beyond the park gates, who will write me constantly accounts of him; and you will give him all the indulgences to which he is accustomed."

"That will be many; for you are a good woman to the child, and a better wife than he deserves, to the worst of husbands," retorted the wayward Italian. "But your instructions are superfluous. I must accompany you to town."

"You certainly will not," replied Matilda, irritated by the positive tone of her domestic. "My plans are otherwise arranged."

"Hearken!" resumed Ghita, drawing nearer to Lady Norman, as they skirted together a ragged thicket of hawthorns covering one of the slopes of the park. "There is a subject to which, by your desire, I have been forbidden to allude. But the inter-diction holds good no longer when I know my boy to be in danger. I am not blind to all that is passing here. collusion which, when childless, you granted to your husband, is now bitterly repented both by yourself and him. It is not

possible, it is not in woman's nature, that you should consent to

disinherit your legitimate son."

"My legitimate son is not yet in existence," replied Matilda, almost dreading the sequel of Ghita's remonstrances; lest projects of deeper guilt than she dared contemplate, should be unfolded to her. "I may become the mother of a girl."

"The chances are even. But should an heir be born to Selwood, I am as convinced as that I have life, there would be evil dealing with my boy. Walter is to be left at this obscure place; and when he becomes burdensome, will be spirited away."

"No spot in England, however obscure, is beyond the vigilance of the law," said Matilda, in a tremulous voice. "And how dare you suppose that Sir Richard Norman would be guilty

of an atrocious action?"

"I have never known him scrupulous," said Ghita, with one of her sneers of former days. "A sin more or less, costs him nothing. Lawless and godless,—a bad son to the Church,—a traitor to all who love him."

"I cannot hear this," exclaimed Matilda, trying to shake off her companion. "Leave me, and return to the house."

"I shall do neither one nor the other, Eccelenza, till you have granted my request," said Ghita, folding her hands before her, and persisting in accompanying Lady Norman. "In you I have some confidence. You are too good to allow an injury to be offered to my boy. I will answer for nothing that happens during your absence. I choose to accompany you to town."

"Do you pretend that Sir Richard has shown less affection

than myself towards that unfortunate child?" demanded

Matilda resentfully.

"Far from it. He has shown more, as in duty bound. But the change in his deportment since your situation declared itself, has not been lost upon me. He is growing peevish and irritable with Walter. What will he be should a fine legitimate young son be born to his house? I know him, and therefore dread to think of it."

"I know him; and am certain that he will never do less than justice to the child so rashly adopted," said Matilda, with

dignity.

"Prove your good intentions then, honoured lady, by permitting us to accompany you on your journey," pleaded Ghita, laying a detaining hand upon her dress. "If no evil be intended, the petition is a slight one. Keep us in your sight. Do not banish us from your protection. Consider how that little one loves you. Your own will not love you better. Let him not be cast out to perish like the son of the bond-

"Is he your own, Ghita," demanded Matilda, on the rash impulse of the moment, "that you plead thus warmly?"

Mine?-The mercy of heaven forbid!" replied the Italian.

"Rather die than call my own the son of such a father. But your ladyship must recollect," said the woman, checking herself as she noticed the sudden start given by Matilda, "that I was in personal attendance upon you the day Walter was brought to St. Sylvain, and that I cannot be more his mother than

"I remember!" faltered Lady Norman, grieved that such

memories should be recalled to her at such a moment.
"You grant my request then?" demanded Ghita, encouraged by her mistress's subdued tone.

"Sir Richard must determine. The decision rests not with

myself."
"Every decision would rest with yourself had you energy to support your rights!" cried the Italian. "You allow this man to crush your spirit into nothingness, to drag you when and whither he pleases, to exile you from your friends and country, in order to force upon your adoption a -

"Ghita?—what means this vehemence?" demanded the voice of some person overtaking them. And in a moment, the arm of the Italian was seized, and Matilda found Sir Richard by

her side.

"Ghita is requesting me to take our little boy with us to London," said Lady Norman, dreading the violence to which he might be provoked by her companion. "She fancies Walter will fret after me, if left alone at Belwood."

"He will not be alone. Mrs. Ravenscroft has undertaken

the charge of him."

"No person shall have the charge of him but me!" cried Ghita, unabashed. "And once for all, I will not remain here at the château!"

"You pretend to disobey my commands?" cried Norman, furiously.

"I do! Would that I had disobeyed them earlier!"

"Then quit my house, and for ever!" cried the angry man.

unused to find his authority opposed.

"Instantly, if you require it!" replied Margherita, resuming the scornful air so offensive of old to Lady Norman. "It is not in your service, heaven knows, that I have the slightest inclination to remain. But, before I go, I feel it my duty to declare to this angel, for the sake of my unfortunate little charge—"
"You dare?" vociferated Sir Richard, seizing her by the

arm, and hurling her to some paces' distance.

"I dare!" persisted Margherita, roused rather than intimi-

dated by his violence.

"Silence!" cried Lady Norman, interposing with a degree of energy so unusual to her as to impose silence for a moment upon both parties. "I choose to know nothing which Sir Richard desires should remain a secret."

"Dupe that you are! You deserve your fate!" ejaculated

the impetuous Italian. Then, as if suddenly recollecting that she was injuring the cause of her nursling, she flung herself at the feet of Matilda, exclaiming, "Pardon, pardon, for the poor hot-headed Istrian, who knows not how to control her words when her heart's blood is stirred up! I have a deeper stake in when her heart's blood is surred up! I have a deeper stake in all this, lady, than you know of! Take pity on me and the boy, and let us accompany you to London!"

"Be it so," replied Lady Norman, influenced by some inexplicable instinct. "You shall attend me to London. But it is

on condition, Ghita, that this scene is never to be renewed; and that you do not attempt to disturb my tranquillity by obscure

hints, unavailing to any honourable purpose."

"I promise!" replied the woman, taking Matilda's hand and pressing it to her lips.

"Swear it!" cried Sir Richard.
"Oaths are for such as you!" cried the woman, extricating herself from the grasp he had laid upon her shoulder. "She would not believe me the more for that without which you do not believe me at all. But you may trust me. For her sake, I

will be silent.'

Luckily for all parties, they now emerged from the shrubbery and attained the open lawn; for Matilda, even with the assistance of Sir Richard's arm, was scarcely able to reach the house. As they crossed the vestibule, little Walter came bounding towards them; and for the first time, Sir Richard thrust him harshly aside, and forbade him to follow them into the library, where he proceeded to deposit the trembling Matilda upon the sofa; thus unconsciously justifying in her eyes the mysterious accusations of the nurse.

In the course of the evening she despatched a note of thanks and apology to Mrs. Ravenscroft, acquainting her with their change of plans; and on the following day persisted in taking the boy with her in the carriage, on her first day's journey towards town.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The storms of life fly over the heads of the middle class, and break upon towering mountains and lofty cedars. They have got no ill-got places to lose. They are neither libelled nor undermined; but without invading any man's right, sit safe and warm in a moderate fortune of their own.—Dr. South.

LONDON, in September, has been too frequently described as the type of everything desolate and dull; savouring of mellow apples, and encumbered with bricklayers' ladders; the pavement damp, the air stagnant, the atmosphere obscured by fogs; neither cheered out of doors by the freshness of the weather, nor

indoors by the cheeriness of winter pastimes.

Europe scarcely produces, in fact, a city more disagreeable than London, between August and the New-year; and the fact is nowhere more apparent than in its ultra-fashionable quarters. Throughout Hill Street, where a house was engaged for the Normans, not a window but was closely shuttered; nor a door but was sealed as hermetically as a mausoleum. In that part of the town, which is said to contain a population of lords and lackeys, neither lord nor lackey was perceptible. The standard footman with his powdered head, and the standard marquis with his empty head, was alike in provincial seclusion.

Sir Richard's knock, on his daily return home to dinner, sounded hollow through the empty street. Even the infirm old charwomen left in charge of the opposite houses (the most cheerful-looking of which had its windows left open to disclose vast placards of "To let, unfurnished," scarcely visible through the dim glass), being too lazy to look out and ascertain the cause of so unusual a disturbance. Nor was his coming a source of much enlivenment to Matilda. He had nothing to relate; had seen and heard nothing, except the coughs of starving hackney-coach horses stationary on their stands, or a few cabriolets scudding along St. James's Street, with their freight of dandies run to seed; a miserable species, indigenous in the atmosphere of the clubs, and visible above the horizon only between the hours of four post meridiem, and four past midnight. But with these, the aborigines of May Fair and bushrangers of Hyde Park, Sir Richard had long abjured connection. He now "wandered lonely as a cloud" through the deserted metropolis; and the fussy, fastidious dame, who was to officiate as Matilda's nurse, recommended by the physician recommended by Lady Farleigh, was heard to pronounce that the usual ceremony of tying up the knocker with a kid-glove might

certainly be dispensed with, in that most deserted house of that

most deserted metropolis.

All this did not tend to raise the spirits of Lady Norman. The exclusivism of the waiting-gentlewoman, accustomed only to attend upon exclusives, revolted her; Mrs. Smith being evidently of opinion that a lady not in Lady Dawlish's set, and not even presented, was a patient beneath her cure: till at length Matilda reverted with regret to the good-humoured familiarity of Madame Gervais, so much more in character with the duties of her calling.

But the recollection of Madame Gervais brought with it a host of painful recollections! St. Sylvain, with its accusing reminiscences, rose before her. She seemed to hear the old Frenchwoman's hearty laugh, exulting whenever she effected some manœuvre to baffle the curiosity of the servants; and to see the cordial looks with which, every morning, she brought the infant to be kissed and admired, after the completion of its toilet; saying, in a tone not to be resisted, "I must have an embrace for my poor little boy! If not his mother, remember you have undertaken to be his friend."

"Who will be the friend of my child?"—thought Matilda,

"if this business should end unfavourably! I have cultivated the affections of none, and by none shall I be remembered with

affection!

It was in vain that Sir Richard Norman devoted his time and eloquence to dispel her despondency. Useless to propose rides and walks, when all that greeted without was but a repetition of the monotonous scene within! Useless to propose new publications, or works of fiction, for the amusement of a person

whose thoughts were thus sickened with care!

How different would have been the impressions of Lady Norman, could she have emerged from the stagnant oppression of the abandoned city, for a glimpse of the cheerful, happy home of the Avesfords! Fern Hill, in grandeur so many degrees beneath the scale of Selwood Manor, was a gay little spot; a compact, commodious house, standing in a paddock of about a hundred acres in extent; deriving its chief interest from an extensive prospect over the banks of the Mersey, with a view of the Irish Channel. The house and establishment, of moderate extent, were in a progressive state. The prudent merchant, who allowed himself to spend there only two days of the week, with occasional visits during the other five, constantly brought with him some addition to the comforts or beautifications of home. There was movement and expectation about Fern Hill, an adjoining farm, to the purchase of which young Avesford looked confidently forward; and he had promised saddle-horses to his wife for the following year. He was, in truth, a sensible, enterprising, warm-hearted fellow; delighted to afford a happy home to the old age of his father-in-law, and by no means likely to

become a martyr to the domestic tyranny of Tom Cruttenden. The friend of the family was invited to Fern Hill whenever it suited him to absent himself from the factory. But it was clear, from the first visit, that he was to come as a guest, and not as a master. Avesford would not even allow Elizabeth's father to

be bullied with impunity in his presence.

Though still a stranger to the Normans, he had been tolerably enlightened by his wife as to their position with regard to the family. He saw that one of Maule's handsome daughters, having married above her station, had been constrained by a proud egotistical husband to renounce all intimate connection with home; and foresaw that the long absence of the Selwood family on the continent, and the marriage of John Maule and Elizabeth in the interim, would complete their alienation. For his own part he cared very little to make their acquaintance. But the fond leaning of his wife towards her gentle sister, whom Tom Cruttenden persisted in asserting to be the most ill-used and unhappy of women, prevented his admitting, in presence of Elizabeth, his indifference to the fate of Matilda.

One bright September morning, Avesford made his appearance betimes at Fern Hill, to enjoy a day's sport in some neighbouring preserves; and do honour to a visit from Cruttenden, who was come to spend a few days with his old partner. He found the party assembled at breakfast in a cheerful baywindowed room, commanding a view of the sea, discussing the probability of the arrival of John Maule and his wife, who were

to visit them in the course of the autumn.

"Maule, my man, set your chair a little way round the corner, and make room for Avesford by his wife," cried Tom Cruttenden, doing the honours to his host the moment he entered the room. "You need not put in more tea, Betsy; 'tis strong as poison already. I'm sorry to say it, my dear, but you never had a notion of making tea: few women have. Women make one wait for the tea till it's cold; and for bread and butter till it's hot. Avesford, when you've done whispering there, I'll thank you for the newspapers. I suppose you've been elever enough to bring them in your pocket?"

"I mean to be clever enough to keep them there," replied Avesford, continuing his breakfast. "Elizabeth does not allow

reading at table."

"The deuce she don't! How long has Betsy begun to lay down the law?"

"Ever since she became my wife," replied Avesford,

laughing.

"If she means her bad tea to go down without help of the morning papers, I can tell her she's mistaken!" oried old Crutt., with rising choler.

"Surely the news at this season of the year will keep till we rise from table?" observed Maule, gaining courage from his

son-in-law's valour to oppose his petulant partner. "Neither parliament nor the courts of law are sitting.

"What can you possibly expect to find in the papers?"

demanded Avesford, provokingly.

"If I knew beforehand, I should have no call to read them!" oried Cruttenden, snappishly. "Maybe the announcement of a hurricane at St. Kitt's; or a fire in the docks, to take the shine

out of the house of Avesford and Son."
"Many thanks!" replied the young merchant, laughing heartily at the ready malice of the retort. "But my father's estates at Basseterre, and my own warehouses, are amply insured. Real estates defy the terrors of the three other elements. Try again!"

"Perhaps I may be looking out for the death of the Woldham parson; the reversion of whose living I purchased last

spring.

"Nothing will suit your taste, in fact, but a casualty!" cried vesford. "But be not uneasy about Woldham. The climate is the healthiest in Yorkshire. The last incumbent lived to be eighty, and his predecessor was a centenarian."

"A sectarian, I suppose you mean," cried Crutt., chuckling at the idea that he was setting his adversary right. "Well! if the old gentleman at Woldham holds on, John must rest

contented with his curacy. It makes no odds to me."

As this was the first intimation offered to the family by Tom
Cruttenden of his intended gift to young Maule of a living of twelve hundred a year, it was not, of course, to be passed over without acknowledgments from the father and sister; which Tom interrupted by exclaiming,

"Truce to your humbugging. Just fellow to hand me over the newspapers!" Just trouble that young

"I am afraid I must make an exception in your favour," said Avesford, who was fond of trifling with the petulance of the old bachelor. "But if you find anything extraordinary in the great letters, favour us with the communication, in token of

gratitude."

"Great letters, forsooth!" ejaculated Tom, tearing open the envelopes of the morning papers. "You don't think me ass enough, at my time of life, to read the opinions of a greater ass than myself, when I have facts lying before me? The great letters are intended for old women and young children; and I've ceased to be one, and not begun to be the other. Bless my stars!" cried he, interrupting himself as he glanced along the columns, "I hadn't the least notion of such a thing!"

"Of what?" demanded his three auditors, with some

interest.

"What can it signify to you?" cried Cruttenden, spitefully, "Neither parliament nor the law courts are sitting, you know!"

"Have you found tidings of a fire, or a hurricane, or some-thing else equally agreeable?" exclaimed Avesford.

"What will you give me for my news?" demanded the old

gentleman of Elizabeth.

"A cup of tea rather less strong than poison."

"Worth more than that, Madam Betsy. Bid again!"

"She will grant you her forgiveness for daring to trifle with her curiosity," observed Avesford, "which, in my opinion, is more than you deserve.

"The deuce it is!" said Cruttenden, putting the paper into his pocket. "Then she may wait my pleasure to learn what I

was going to tell her about poor Matty.

"About Matilda?" exclaimed Mr. Maule and his daughter. "Ay, about Matty, and another person belonging to her. Not her fine parchment-and-pedigree Jesuit of a husband,

"Her child, then! I trust in Heaven no evil has happened to

her little son!" cried the warm-hearted Mrs. Avesford.

"That's more than she deserves at your hands," sneered old "Twill be a plaguy long time before Matty trusts to Heaven to bestow its succour upon you!"

"My sister's thoughts towards her family are kinder, Mr. Cruttenden, than you give her credit for," said Elizabeth warmly. "Our intercourse has only been checked by the mistrust with which, early in her marriage, you inspired my father."
"Ay! Avesford has me to thank that he does not find you

telling your beads every morning, instead of reading the chapters for the day."

"But about Matilda?" cried Elizabeth impatiently.

"If my lady is the affectionate sister you describe, no doubt you will have a letter to inform you of it by the post."

But he was deprived of the delight of inflicting further torment on Mrs. Avesford. Her husband, coming adroitly behind him while engaged in squabbling, extracted the paper from his pocket, and read aloud—"On the 15th inst., in Hill Street, Berkeley Square, the lady of Sir Richard Norman, Bart., of a daughter."

"Matilda in England! Matilda in London! Matilda the mother of a little girl!" burst simultaneously from the lips of

her father and Mrs. Avesford.

"It strikes me now," interrupted Cruttenden, not deigning to notice the manœuvre practised on him by Avesford, "that were Matty anything worth speaking of, either as daughter or sister, it wouldn't be from the public papers you had to learn her return to her native country, after so many years' absence."

"Her letters may have miscarried," said Mrs. Avesford, in a

mortified voice.

"Letters rarely miscarry," observed her husband gravely;

"never, unless when they are known to contain something to repay the hazard of abstraction."

'When did you hear from her last?" demanded Cruttenden

provokingly.

"My father received the last letter in June or July."

"In May," again observed Mr. Avesford. "It was before we came hither for the summer."

"And didn't she tell you there was a chance of another olivebranch, or yew-branch I should be apt to call it, off such a parent stock as the Normans?"

"She made no allusion to the subject," observed old Maule,

absorbed in reflection.

"Why she must have been pretty sure of it four months ago. I suppose Matty has learned from her husband the art of making mysteries about nothing; and I wish that may be the worst lesson the fellow has taught her. When young Crutt. was in town last spring, he'd a deal of talk about Sir Richard with a rich cousin of his, a city banker; and not knowing Crutt.'s relationship, 'twas wonderful what length the old

gentleman went in speaking of the Baronet."
"That must be the father of our neighbour Lady Audley,"
observed Elizabeth, half-aside to her husband. "I had no idea she was so nearly connected with my brother-in-law."

"Never call him brother-in-law, Betsy, if you've the slightest respect for yourself!" exclaimed Cruttenden. "For you know he looks on the whole family as so much dirt; and all but turned Crutt. out of his house, when he took the trouble of going over to see his sister in France."

"About Sir Richard's respect or regard, I trust my wife is too wise to trouble herself," said young Avesford, calmly. "But I confess I feel mortified for and with her, that her sister should be settled in London without giving any intimation of her return to England. We shall live very happily without Lady Norman; and, I trust, Lady Norman will live very happily without us. But, in my own family, in my own humble sphere of society, such conduct would be thought

unfeeling and preposterous.

"That's because you're an uncivilized savage!" cried Cruttenden, with one of his driest sneers. "Nothing but savages are influenced nowadays by the instincts of natur'. How would the fashionable world get on so smoothly, if people were to encumber themselves with the old-fashioned lumber and baggage of feelings and affections? Light weight and no luggage allowed, is your only go! I'll be bound Matty has forgotten in what county she was born; and in another year or two will open her eyes languidly, and wonder whether she ever had a father.

All were silent: Elizabeth and old Manle from painful emotion: and Avesford, from feeling that there was more reason in old Cruttenden's diatribe than usually graced his harangues.

But though indignant against the coldness of "Lady Norman," a thousand kind feelings towards "Matty" gradually rose in the minds of these worthy people, when they pictured her as the happy mother of a young family. Elisabeth sometimes thought her sister not sufficiently circumstantial in her letters touching the beauty and qualities of her little son, whom they had heard described by others as one of the handsomest children in existence. But she felt sure that a little girl would fill up the measure of Matilda's affections;—a little girl, fair and gentle as herself;—a little girl, such as Mrs. Avesford often dreamed of calling her own. She began to conjecture by what name the little stranger would be distinguished. Would it be called Matilda, after its mother; or Elizabeth, after its grandmother and aunt?

"My dear good woman," cried old Tom, tapping her on the shoulder; "you might as well expect Matty to call it Brummagemina at once! Take my word for't, 'twill be Alicia, or Mildred, or Blanche, or some other fine name, connected with the tombstones in Selwood church. The bantling is not to be brought up a papist by that old sneak of a priest,—that's one comfort. Or as sure as we're all alive, the word mother would have been struck out of the fifth commandment, when little Miss came to be taught the way of making her days long in the land."

Notwithstanding the unsatisfactory mode in which the news of her sister's return had reached Fern Hill, Mrs. Avesford was too kind-hearted to demur about offering her good wishes on the occasion. She wrote simply and affectionately,—she could write in no other guise,—stating how dearly she longed to hold her sister and her sister's children in her arms; and thanking Heaven that, on this occasion, the babe had seen the light in the land of its fathers. She asked a thousand questions concerning her little niece, which she had never been tempted to inquire concerning her little nephew; whether fair or dark, blue-eyed or brown; whether displaying any resemblance to its mother or to the young sister they had lost, who had been for many years the ailing nursling of Elizabeth.

Little did Mrs. Avesford imagine, as she penned these womanly queries, which would have called down lightnings of scorn from old Cruttenden, what tears of delight they were to draw from the eyes of Matilda! Lady Norman felt as if her lovely infant had found a friend; as if, though so scandalously unwelcome to its parents, the little creature was safe in the affections of the kind and the worthy. Holding it more closely to her bosom, she breathed her thanks to the Almighty that, among her own kindred and in her father's house, its coming had been hailed as a blessing. She even took courage to

entreat Sir Richard's permission that her sister might be its second godmother; Lord and Lady Selsdon having already petitioned to be two of the sponsors: the careless tone in which he gave his assent, so different from that in which he treated the slightest matters relating to his adopted child, convinced her that the little girl,—the little Protestant,—would claim a small share in his affections.

Matilda had been spared the spectacle of her husband's agony, while uncertain respecting the sex of the child. Her sufferings had been protracted. But, great as they were, and sincere as was his sympathy, not even the idea of her danger had obliterated a moment from his mind the predominant fear that a legitimate son would be born, to shake the firmness of Matilda. Ghita, the only person by whom his terrors were witnessed, was not of a temper to reveal to Lady Norman the pitiable state in which, on the staircase leading to the chamber of his wife, he had awaited information of the sex of his child: or the frenzy of delight with which, on hearing it announced as a girl, he had rushed into the room where Walter was playing. snatched him to his bosom, and covered him with countless kisses. All this excitement had subsided, before he ventured into the presence of his wife. It was with leaden eye and staid deportment he accosted her, and imprinted a chilling kiss of welcome upon the forehead of his babe.

Though stung to the soul by his apparent indifference, it was, as usual, herself that Matilda accused as accountable for his fault. Had not an alien been intruded, with her consent, into the sanctities of his home, how differently would this child have been regarded by its father! If Walter had superseded her baby by the influence of his attractions and endearments, who but herself was to blame? It was she who had introduced a rival under its father's roof. It was she who had diminished its share of parental tenderness and worldly prosperity, by the

substitution of an heir to Selwood!

CHAPTER XIX.

A guilty conscience is as a whiripool; drawing in all to itself which would otherwise pass by.—Fuller.

ABSORBED in delights so new and exquisite as those created in the heart of a young mother by every utterance and feature of her firstborn babe, Lady Norman, during the weeks following its arrival, took little heed of what was passing in the house. Mrs. Ghrimes, the permanent woman of the bedchamber, and Mrs. Smith, the temporary, fought out their animosities unobstructed, without so much as disturbing the attention of Matilda. Heart and soul were devoted to that little helpless, unmeaning, moaning thing, which exceeded in her estimation of human importance, a college of cardinals, or a diet of the empire.

Sir Richard, she knew, passed his mornings at his club. was beginning to interest himself in politics. The prospects of Emancipation were becoming daily more distinct. Great names were now enlisted in the cause; and on them great hopes were founded. Poor little Walter could no longer command an auditor for his simple narratives when he came home from his daily walk in the deserted park, or the cheerless limits of Berkeley Square. In vain did he tell of horses and chariots (gods, men, and columns); no one cared to hear of his adventures. Even his account of a pretty lady, "almost as pretty as mamma, only not so goodnatured-looking," by whom he was noticed and fondled, failed to draw down upon Ghita the usual admonition addressed on such occasions by English ladyships to English menials: "Remember, you are on no account to suffer strangers to speak to the children." Matilda was in fact scarcely conscious of the child's presence in her room when he returned from his excursions; and Sir Richard was content to see him well and happy.

At length the day approached for the dismissal of Lady Norman's professional attendants. The bloom of health was once more upon her cheek; and when rendering thanks for her recovery, she had the satisfaction of devoting her little girl to the Protestant faith, under the auspicious name of "Constance." A day at a fortnight's distance was fixed for the return of the family to Selwood; and, by Sir Richard's permission, invitations were already despatched to her friends in Lancashire and Yorkshire, to meet them at the Manor shortly before Christmas,

for the celebration of the christening.

All that remained for Matilda was to regain strength as

rapidly as possible; and to effect this, she was advised to try

gentle exercise, in addition to her daily airings.

"You must come with me, dear mamma, into the square, and bring my little sister with you, and I will take care of you both, was Walter's prompt invitation, on hearing the prescription "You can lean on my arm, you know, when you are tired; and I will introduce you to my beautiful lady."

"What beautiful lady, sir?" demanded Sir Richard, who

happened to be present.

"A lady who gives me fruit and flowers, and inquires of me

about you and mamma."

"Of whom is he speaking?" resumed Norman, addressing

Matilda.

"Some lady fond of children, who has been captivated by his beauty in Berkeley Square. I was not aware that any person in this neighbourhood was left in town."

"It is very wrong of Ghita to let the child make promiscuous acquaintances," cried Sir Richard, angrily. "How do we know whom this woman may be?"

"At his age, surely, it does not much signify. But Ghita, who is not without tact, says that Walter's friend is a real lady.

"So are many whom I should be sorry to see bestowing

caresses on my child."

"Walter's friend is usually accompanied by one or two gentlemen, and has a carriage waiting for her at the gate."

"She sometimes asks me to take a drive with her," cried

Walter; "but Ghita would never let me go."

"Ghita is perfectly right. Pray ascertain who it is," continued Sir Richard, addressing his wife, "the first time you accompany the children to the square."

" I know so few people by sight, that I shall be as useless in

my account as Walter.

'But you do know this lady," cried the child; "for she talks about you and papa as if she had very often seen you, and asks me so many droll questions about are you fond of each other,and is my papa glad to have my little sister,—and does he take more notice of it than of me."

"She appears to be a very inquisitive, officious person!" cried Sir Richard. "I do not half like his account of her."

In the sequel, still less did he like the actuality; for, on Walter being accompanied by Matilda into the square, the little boy's anonymous patroness proved to be Lady Catherine Norman.

Vexed at this accidental encounter, Sir Richard attributed the most alarming importance to the inquiries of Giles Norman's wife. Secluded from the coteries of the fashionable world, he was not yet aware that Lady Catherine's existence as Giles Norman's wife, was merely supplementary to her import-

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ance as one of the hydra heads of the ascendant lury party; one of those empty, noisy heads, which contrive to render them-

selves more prominent than heads of higher capacity.

From a person, Lady Catherine had become a personage. In that frippery epoch of "gilt and gaud," a handsome chattering woman of high descent, qualified by nature and art to look down and talk down the efforts of the untitled and uninitiated, had wonderful scope for the exercise of her insolent egotism. The religious disabilities of her husband prevented his profiting by her influence so far as to assume a post in the administration. There was no pretext for insinuating his name into the redbook, or her ladyship's into the pension-list. But though unable to shine as more than one of the golden tassels on the fringe of the administration, she kept a house of call for Downing-street danglers out of employ; and by the blaze of her beauty and high Toryism, threw into eclipse the insignificance of her husband. As it was impossible to make something of him, she made him nothing. Insignificant in mind and purposes, Giles Norman rejoiced in a position which a man of spirit and honour would have rebutted as injurious. Lady Catherine's levities of conduct affected a cloak of decorum; but they were not the less abominable in the estimation of right-thinking and right-feeling persons. And the quiet pomposity with which Norman offered his protection, and really advanced the interests of his proteges, convinced the world that he saw no shame in the injury derived from so high and profitable a source.

Success, however, was on their side. Supported by "Ladv Dawlish's set," by high birth, and self-sufficiency, Lady Catherine brandished her oriflamme, and, like the maid of Orleans, was pronounced to be a holy woman, so long as she remained triumphant. Who, in fact, could presume to cast a stone at her, among those whose missiles of diamonds and rubies are as fatal as paving-stones; but who are so cautious in their selection of the victims against whom they arm their slings? Lady Catherine was an ornament to their parties, an enhancement to their dinners; could make cornets of their sons, and niche their grandmothers into the pension list; provide for their superannuated butlers, and sport with prebendal stalls as lightly as with stalls at the opera. Under her auspices, the whispering school of Madame de Montrond was introduced into Carlton House; and while she occupied some remote divan at the Pavilion, discussing with Princess Wittagemot the becomingness of a new turban or curl of an ostrich-feather, the dupes of fashion stood aloof and respected the coalition, believing it to refer to protocols and preliminaries of peace. There was a tone of sarcasm about Lady Catherine, polished down, however, by a course of Parisian courtiership and diplomacy, which it was not easy to connect with the real triviality of her mind,

"The world," as in Shakspeare's time, "is still deceived with

ornament." and runs headlong to surrender itself to any gallant band of marauders that advances with plumes waving, colours flying, and the haha of the trumpet; and so great is the influence of consistency and perseverance in giving weight to a party, that people were, at that period, blinded into respect for a gang whose unanimity consisted in a general thirst for plunder; whose moral principle was the promotion of the greatest happiness of the smallest number; and whose political, "let us maintain the throne, that the throne may maintain us!" Yet so neat was the workmanship of their cabinets, so compact the organization of their party, so close and unattackable its homogeneity, that lost in admiration of the ingenuity of the wasp's nest, the spectators overlooked the uselessness and noxiousness of the insects

by which it had been created.

Of the temple of Conservatism, Lady Catherine was, in short a high priestess; concocting her auguries with that sacred bird the golden-egg-laying goose—the people of unreformed Eng-and. But upon Sir Richard Norman her oracular influence was nil. He saw in her only the woman whose children had suffered wrong by his imposture; and who was, probably, intent upon discovering and exposing its extent. Believing her to be a model of maternal tenderness, he dreamed not that since the child, formerly so pampered with indulgences, had forfeited its chance of heirship to Selwood Manor, Lady Catherine's ambition had swerved from the boy to concentrate itself exclusively in political intrigue; Master Norman the elder being consigned to oblivion at school. Scarcely, meanwhile, had Matilda's vexation subsided at the discovery of Lady Catherine's advances, when she received a note from Lady Dawlish, saying that, being in town for a day or two, on her way from Walmer Castle to her seat in the north, she hoped Sir Richard and Lady Norman would do her the charity to dine with her the following day; to meet a few of the only race of people then extant in London-ministers and guardsmen.

"I have written a civil answer, declining the invitation," observed Matilda to her husband, while Sir Richard glanced over the note, on his return soon afterwards from his club.

" Declining it? Why did you not consult me?"

"I fancied that, disliking as you do Lady Dawlish's set, the last thing you could desire would be to dine in their com-

"Is it necessary to entertain a profound esteem for those with whom one occasionally exchanges cutlets and claret?" with whom one occasionally exchanges that been leading a inquired Norman, with a smile. "We have been leading a dull life lately, and it would have suited me very well to go." My

"Then you have still the opportunity," said Matilda.

note is not yet despatched, and can be written again."

Instead of refusing, as she had anticipated, when he found

the power of option remained, Sir Richard accepted her proposal. "We have lived too much out of society, my dear Matilda, since our marriage," said he. "It is injury to my cause and party to have neglected, as I have done, all occasion of extending my personal influence. Now that we have children, too, we must not overlook their interests for the indul-

gence of selfish indolence."

Without exactly understanding in what way little Constance's prospects were to be advanced by her mother's dining with Lady Dawlish, Matilda gladly consented to accompany her husband. The secluded life she led at Selwood was an effort of submission on her part, not of choice; and she felt the inconsistency of their having mixed in the most brilliant coteries of continental society, while to that of London she was a stranger. At Rome, Naples, Florence, Vienna, Lady Norman had shone a star in the highest circles of fashion. But it was there alone that she had formed the acquaintance of English people of her own condition of life.

Next day, at the hour appointed, the Normans proceeded to Grosvenor Square, with a punctuality savouring of the well-bred old-fashioned habits of the country and the continent. Nothing, however, was visible in the drawing-room but a blazing fire, and the bag of lustrous glazed calico enclosing the chandelier; and Matilda might have apprehended that she had mistaken the day, but for the intimation of the groom of the chambers, that "her ladyship had just gone up stairs to dress,

and that the evening papers were on the table."

By-and-by, Colonel Noel sauntered in from White's, to flurry away to his dressing-room, on perceiving that two antediluvians were already arrived, though it was only a quarter past seven, and they had been asked at seven, meaning of course eight. In the course of the next three quarters of an hour, the room gradually filled with the seven others, who with the Normans and their hosts were to make up the sociable dozen.

Of these, the two first who made their appearance were fresh from Carlton House, with grave announcements of the severe illness of Queen Charlotte, Lord Longwind and the Right Honourable Chandos Lydde, two cabinet ministers and men of the world. Next came Sir Godfrey and Lady Chichester, an ultra-fashionable couple of which the female moiety was an untirable chatterbox. The fifth was an easy, agreeable, selfsatisfied middle-aged man, whom everybody called by a name which Lady Norman mistook for Ratstail or Ratstill; but whether lord, baronet, or commoner, she could not guess, so completely had Ned Reddesdell, the wit, escaped the knowledge of Selwood Manor.

Two more were waited for to complete the party-waited for, till Matilda grew tired of waiting. But when, at twenty minutes after eight, a carriage stopped at the door, Lady

Dawlish leant over to her and whispered, "I hope it will be no disagreeable surprise to you to meet your relations the Normans? I find from Lady Catherine that all enmity is over between you. And as those sort of family dissensions are out of date in the present century, I concluded you would be glad to bring it to a close."

to bring it to a close.

What Lady Dawlish meant by this latter phrase, Matilda did not exactly understand. She felt that she should be content to wait another hour for dinner, to allow time for Sir Richard's indignation to subside ere his offending relatives entered the room. But to her surprise, he accepted with a smile Giles Norman's bow of recognition; and, on Lady Catherine's accosting her with inquiries after her little friend Walter and compliments on her rapid recovery, Sir Richard stepped forward courteously to take part in the conversation.

Colonel Noel now sauntering back into the room, followed by a heavy, ordinary, old man, whom Matilda mistook for the butler come to announce dinner, but who proved to be the

Earl of Dawlish, dinner was served.

Hitherto "Lady Dawlish's set" had been revealed to Matilda and her husband in eclipsed splendour; drooping, as all plants are apt to droop, after transplantation, in the ungenial soil of Paris. Nor did it appear likely that their brilliancy would be more transcendent at an autumnal dinner party; the gold plate being at the bankers, and the striking members of the set scattered over the face of the three kingdoms. For the Normans had lived enough out of the world to be surprised at discovering what extraordinary refinement may be communicated to a dinner without ostentation, and a party whose merit consists in being appropriately assorted. The common-place grandeurs of Farleigh Castle and tedious state-dinners of foreign courts, had not prepared Matilda for the easy grace, the spirit of courtesy and enjoyment, prevalent among those endowed with such bad hearts, excellent digestions, and indifferent understandings, as Lady Dawlish's set.

Could Lord Longwind, with his playful repartees, be the tedious man in the course of one of whose parliamentary periods, a friend is said to have proceeded from the House of Lords six times round Westminster Abbey, arriving back at his place before the minister arrived at a full stop? Could the agreeable right honourable to her right, overflowing with anecdotes as piquant as a volume of French memoirs, be the sage privy councillor, whose lengthy plausibilities on questions of national ethics were apt to set even the bench of bishops into a snooze? Even the chit-chat of Lady Chichester, though rapid, was far from vapid. Every point told. She poked right and left with her golden bodkin, till every one was fain to keep on the alert; and though Sir Godfrey talked only of cooks and jockeys, the worthies and heroes of his school

of the Fine Arts, he talked of them with so much originality, as to render the subject as amusing as a fairy tale. On Ratstail, or Reddesdell, she pondered with less surprise, but equal admiration; for it had already been whispered to her by Giles Norman, lest exposing herself she should immortalize the family name in the amber of an epigram, that he was the most eminent wit of the era.

"When do you set off for the North, my dear Lady Daw-

lish?" inquired Lady Chichester of her friend.

"To-morrow, or to-morrow week, or to-morrow fortnight, as it may please the fates and Lord Dawlish to determine. But there is such a charming set of people in town, that I am well inclined to stay. Lord Dawlish gets his rubber every night till every morning; and I have my rooms full every morning till every night. One sees one's friends at this time of year. An open house is a godsend. People do not forget their friends."

"It will remain very full till the holidays," observed Lady Catherine. "His royal highness does not go to Brighton till next month. You had much better remain here. What will

you do at Eastport?"

"Her ladyship will entertain her country neighbours at her own expense, and entertain herself at theirs," said Reddesdell. "I shall have to invite the whole county," said Lady Daw-

"I shall have to invite the whole county," said Lady Dawlish, languidly. "We have not been at Eastport these ten months; and the house will want airing before we attempt our regular Christmas party. Mr. Chandos Lydde; remember you have promised us a fortnight this winter. Mr. Norman and Lady Catherine are to be with us."

"I am half afraid!" ejaculated Lady Catherine, in a tone of plausible regret. "His royal highness hinted last night that he counted upon us for Brighton. However, I am going there

to-night, and will feel my way about getting off."

"Whom are you likely to have to-night?" inquired Colonel Noel. "If I thought Madame de Wittagemot and that new Polish woman would be there, I'd look in myself. His royal highness has asked me four times in the last fortnight. I have something important to communicate to M'Mahon."

something important to communicate to M'Mahon."
"Indeed!" demanded Lady Catherine, lowering her voice, and vexed at the idea of anything important reaching the Blue

Chamber through other hands and lips than her own.

And the moment Reddesdell perceived that Noel had something to say concerning Carlton House, which Lady Catherine Norman thought worth listening to, he wound up Lord Longwind into one of his long stories, under cover of pretending to listen to which, it was easy to seize the heads of the royal secret.

"Have you any private news from Kew?" was her ladyship's faint whisper, aware that the state of his royal mother

was just then extremely distressing to the prince.

"Kew?-From whom?-about what?--"

"About the improvement said to have manifested itself in

the queen's health.

"I am scarcely the sort of person to make myself a perambulating bulletin," said Noel, with some indignation. "My news is from Geneva."

"From Geneva?"

"If you see M'Mahon, tell him so. He will understand." "What can either of you have to do with Geneva?" ex-claimed Lady Catherine, with increasing curiosity.

"Tell him I shall have it by New-year's day.

"I am scarcely the sort of person to make myself a perambulating enigma," replied Lady Catherine, with a disdainful "I work no telegraph of which I do not understand the smile. signals."

"By the way, shall I see you to-morrow at Princess Wittagemot's?" inquired Lady Catherine, adroitly. "We dine there to meet the Duke of York, Lord Liverpool, Lord Castle-

reagh, and a host of people."

And the brevet-aspiring Lieut.-Colonel, compelled to answer in the negative, immediately found it expedient to add, by way of appeasing the anxieties of the lady frequenting such valuable society-" M'Mahon will inform you that the illustrious individuals expected from Geneva, at Carlton House, by Newyear's day, are neither more nor less than a couple of catterpillars !"

"Creeping things innumerable!" burst involuntarily from the lips of the listening Reddesdell, while Lady Catherine had

nothing to reiterate but "caterpillars?"

"His royal highness, anxious to secure something new and original (to present to somebody or other by way of etrennes) —and knowing me to be in constant correspondence with Bautte, desired M'Mahon to consult me. The thing has been kept a profound secret. I despatched a courier to Geneva without losing a moment; and by to-day's post the news reached me that Bautte's last novelty is on the road; a brace of green enamel caterpillars with ruby eyes, that eat, drink, sleep, and crawl!"

"Like Christians! Which of us does more?" again ejaculated Reddesdell; while Lord Longwind, who took the latter exclamation to be a commentary upon his own text, which happened to regard the arrest of a government clerk charged with robbing the Exchequer, regarded him with unfeigned amazement.

"What have you done about Manchester to-day?" inquired Chandos Lydde, opportunely addressing his legislative lord-

"Nothing, or next to nothing. Marched in a couple of regi-

ments, and a company of artillery, by way of hint."
"Is Manchester disturbed again?" demanded Lady Dawlish,

with an air of disgust. "How troublesome those manufacturing districts are becoming!"

"We shall soon bring them to reason," said Lord Longwind, with a significant nod. "See how quiet they have been at

Derby, since the Brandreth affair."

"It is disgusting to be bored, year after year, with the seditious struggles of those misguided creatures!" exclaimed Lady Dawlish. "People force themselves on public attention now-adays, who, some years ago, would have blushed at the sound of their own name. I have forbidden the newspapers to enter the servants' hall, in any house of mine; and if things go on at their present rate, shall scarcely trust them next year in the stewards' room. The country is in a condition most alarming to thinking minds!"

"How can you wonder?" said Chandos Lydde, with an air of grave indignation. "The mob is not so much to blame. The mob would easily be kept in order, (a set of tame, spiritless, ignorant wretches, who dare not say their souls or their bodies are their own) if left to themselves. But when one finds men of family and education stirring them up to sedition, men like Wolseley and Burdett, for instance, one has a right

to feel indignant."

"Sir Francis will not be satisfied till he raises his head to the level of Temple-bar," said Mr. Norman, knitting his brows. "It is not such fellows as Thistlewood and Dr. Watson who ought to be made examples of; but your Radical baronets, who for the sake of being talked of, set the country into a state of conflagration."

"He should have been first sent to Newgate; then to the place of execution!" said Lord Longwind. "If the throne and altar of this country are ever brought to the dust, it will be remembered in history that Sir Francis Burdett was pioneer to

the mob that first undermined their foundations."

"History will have something else to do than trouble herself with records so contemptible!" observed Lady Catherine Norman, looking stupendous. "Do you suppose, my dear Lord Longwind, that these wretched frame-breakings, and incendiary fires, and Manchester meetings, will produce more effect upon the times, than if one of the regent's enamel caterpillars had crawled over the parchment of Magna Charta? It would be doing too much honour to the mob to fansy that a hundred thousand of them, with Sir Francis at their head, would produce the slightest effect upon the opinions of parliament. The English mob is the most cowardly thing on earth; a lunatic, which a little blood-letting soon brings to its senses. As to the baronet, you might readily draw his teeth and claws, with a peerage. By the way, Lord Longwind, I fear you have forgotten your promise about the folding-doors and new staircase for my Aunt Stavordale's apartments, at Hampton Court?

I had a note from her this morning, poor soul! assuring me that the Woods and Forests are the most uncivil people in the world. She has not spent six months in her apartments for the last ten years. Yet they make objections about building her a stack of chimneys, or some such trifle. She has been putting in patent grates, and they smoke so that she will be obliged to pass her Christmas at one of her son's, Lord Stavordale's, country-seats; or with her daughter, the Duchess of Ellesmere.

"I will make a note of her ladyship's wishes," said Lord

Longwind, bowing profoundly.
"I wonder she did not apply for a pension!" said Lady Dawlish, in a tone of compassion.—"Surely Lord Stavordale served in the first American war ?"

"Certainly. He was aide-de-camp to somebody or other who was severely wounded, and experienced some miraculous escapes. I have heard my aunt Stavordale relate the story a

hundred times."

"Why don't she mention the circumstance to the regent?" said Chandos Lydde, earnestly. "I remember the time when his royal highness never missed one of Lady Stavordale's public breakfasts or masquerades. She has strong claims to his royal highness's recollection."

"I really think I will give her a hint on the subject," replied Lady Catherine. "These are not times for loyalty to

go unrewarded."

"I had a letter yesterday from Lady Arthur D.," interrupted Lady Dawlish, "in which she begs me to reproach you, dear Lady Catherine, with having neglected some request or

protégé of hers. What am I to tell her about it?"

"Not a word! A refusal would bring me half-a-dozen pressing letters from her; and suspense affords her hope, which, like ignorance, is bliss. To say the truth, I have made up my mind never to trouble myself again with any protege of Lady Arthur's! She contrives to pick up a set of miserable wretches in actual want; and if one forgets their case, or misstates it, they make a fuss, and fancy themselves horribly ill-used. Last year, she wrote to me about some stupid old man she wanted to get made gate-keeper at Chelsea Hospital; enclosing me a whole bundle of dirty papers that looked like turnpike-tickets; certificates, and discharges, and that kind of rubbish. Most likely the housemaid found them lying about and lighted the fire with them, for I never beheld them again. Without them, it seems, there was no getting the place; and the ungrateful old man, though I sent him a guinea to compensate his disappointment, had the audacity to write me word I had been the ruin of him. The last time I saw Lady Arthur, she would have it that he had died of a broken-heart!"

"For the loss of a packet of old turnpike-tickets?" demanded

Reddesdell, pretending to misunderstand the story. "What an in-toll-erable invention!

"For the loss of his place," said Lord Longwind, really mis-understanding Reddesdell; "for which, after all, we have no proof that he was qualified."

"No! Lady Catherine's housemaid seems to have monopolized the proofs!" observed Reddesdell. "But, after all, the

discharges had better have missed fire.'

"I must say, in justice to mamma," said Lady Catherine, abruptly, (and every one present wondered what Lady Roscrea could have to say to the veteran's certificates,) "that whenever she has people to push on, they are of a class who are glad to have their services rewarded by government, but can do very well without. Her protégés are grateful, if one succeeds for them; and if not, one hears nothing of hair-triggers or broken-hearts. There was her friend Lionel Warde, you know," continued Lady Catherine, addressing Longwind and Lydde, "whom I plagued your lives and souls out to send governor to Nova Scotia; and you would not, because a military governor was wanted, and Lionel Warde is only a barrister. Certainly, mamma had just then a right to expect wonders from you, my dear Lord Longwind. For she had been making the Dublin Dowagers' wigs stand on end, by receiving, for your sake, your friend Lady Theodosia, who is certainly not fit company for decent people."

"And to whose husband you gave that command in Ireland, because you could not get Lady Theodosia received in London!

added Lady Chichester, laughing.
"And yet, when your letter of refusal arrived about Warde, mamma took it as well as if you had chosen to oblige her. However, it did not much signify. She got him a commissionership of bankrupts instead.

Feeling, perhaps, that these details of the "shop" could not be very entertaining to Matilda and her husband, and that her fair cousin was not serving her cause with them by such naked truths, Lady Dawlish moved to the drawing-room; where Lady Norman had to undergo a thousand interrogatives touching her past proceedings and present projects. Lady Dawlish expressed amazement that, after the dissipations of the continent. Matilda could settle down to the humdrum monotony of a country neighbourhood; while Lady Catherine took occasion to hint how gratifying it would be to her, could Sir Richard be persuaded to visit Brighton; how happy certain distinguished leaders of the Tory party would feel, were Sir Richard Norman to disappear from the ranks of the enemy; and how probable it was that, should Emancipation ever be conceded, it would be by the party in power.

In vain did Matilda assure her that she never attempted to

influence the political opinions of her husband.

"You, at least, permit me to attempt to influence them?" demanded Lady Catherine.
"Certainly!" replied her gentle companion. "But I warn

you that it is labour lost."

"The labour we delight in physics pain!" replied the high priestess. All that evening, she devoted her attentions to the man whom she knew detested her; and on the following day, a footman (whose livery buttons bore the arm and battle-axe, and golden star, described by the young gentleman now involved in other studies than heraldry) left visiting cards in Hill Street from "Mr. and Lady Catherine Norman."

CHAPTER XX.

So absolute she seems And in herself complete. MILTON.

Women of the world have various ways of achieving their ends. Some stoop to conquer, others exalt themselves by bravado. Some vanquish by sweetness, others by bitterness. Lady Catherine Norman was in the habit of accomplishing her purposes by imperturbable coolness. The self-possession with which she parried the rebuffs of Sir Richard, was amazing to the timid Matilda. In her ladyship's days of subordinate con-sequence, when an effort was indispensable to enable her to keep her slippery place in society, she had been loud and insolent. But having now attained what she considered a post of honour, she maintained her perilous footing, like other rope-dancers, by the calmness of her audacity. There was a silent positiveness about her, as forcible as the quiet current of a deep

and dangerous river.

Matilda said "not at home" to her ladyship's visits, declined her invitations to dinner,—replied to her hand-kissings, when they met in their morning drive, by a repulsive bow. But Lady Catherine had an object in view; and heedless of rebuke, went silently and obstinately towards its accomplish-

ment.

Now that all hope was gone of achieving a higher private fortune than the possession of Grove Park and three thousand a year, to which by the death of the old banker they had that spring succeeded, she began to cast her eyes around her in search of other chances of aggrandizement.

She had interest, as it is called, to command everything that interest can command; and the proprietorship of a couple of rotten boroughs would scarcely have effected more for the insignificant Mr. Norman, than a pair of blue eyes in the handsome head of his wife. But his Catholicism unluckily threw him out of the line of advancement. There was no doing anything for him. The disabilities which had made a banker of the father, seemed likely to make a bankrupt of the son. Old Giles, detesting the haughty Protestant daughter-in-law, by whom his eldest son had been seduced from the paths of the Stock Exchange, had bequeathed to his three younger sons his business in Lothbury; and to Lady Catherine's self-conceited husband, his Hertfordshire estates, and an income which would have enabled him to enjoy them, had he not previously created for himself an income of double the amount, the departed capital of which was now to be noid off in the shape of next chirs.

of which was now to be paid off in the shape of post-obits.

But though disqualified to be forwarded to a government in British America or military command in Ireland, young Norman did not despair of promotion; for Lady Catherine had pledged herself that he should be promoted. In the earlier times of their marriage, the Grove Park family had attempted to raise themselves to the level of her aristocratic pretensions, by asserting, that there was a dormant peerage in the family, which law, or equity, or parliament—which is supposed to represent both,—might at any time revive in their favour; to which boast, uttered by Agatha and her brothers, old Norman usually replied by inquiring, how they thought "Lord Woodchurch and Co." would look engraved upon his brass-plate in Lothbury, or inscribed on the creditor side of his banking-books. But the statement had reached the ear of his daughterin-law; and when his demise conveyed to her husband these rights of aristocratic heirship, she set all the faculties of poor old Sir Isaac Heard into movement, to investigate the claim.

For though her ladyship's influence with Carlton House and its ministries would have availed nothing towards the creation of a Catholic peer, it might forward a claim of restoration; and she trusted she had only to prove herself entitled to become Lady Woodchurch, to secure her coronation rights as a peeress

of the realm.

But, alas! no sooner had the Heralds' Office commenced its ferret-like operations among the archives of the White Tower, the British Museum, and other sepulchres of decaying parchments, than it appeared that the most important documents relating to the Woodchurch peerage must be in the possession of Sir Richard Norman, of Selwood Manor; nay, that it depended only upon himself to put in a counter claim by opposing the petition of his kinsman.

This was sad news for Lady Catherine. She could not forget, or trust that the Normans had forgotten, the insults she had heaped upon them in Paris. They were her enemies, enemies of her own creation. Still, she reckoned largely on the insta-

bility which the frivolousness of modern society produces, even in our enmities. If "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel," thou canst not abhor. As easy to imprint a durable impression upon the shifting sands of the seashore, as upon the mobile

characters of a man or woman of the world.

Had the Normans been thorough-paced London fashionables. a few smirks, smiles, and plausibilities might have salved over their wounds. But even in her haughtiest day, she had stood somewhat in awe of the handsome baronet. There was a sternness, or abstraction, she scarcely knew which, in his nature, defying at once her captivations and her aggressions. But it was not for such a self-reliant spirit to despair. She attacked him in what she knew to be a vulnerable point, by her caresses of little Walter; and followed up the manœuvre by a series of civilities and cajolements to his wife.

The same feeling which had prompted Norman to accept the invitation of Lady Dawlish, at length caused him to succumb

under the load of Lady Catherine's courtesy.

"The old brute, my guardian, is gone," said he. "The daughter they wanted to force upon me is married. Of the rest of the family, I know nothing. Lady Catherine's husband is a mere nonentity; and as we are likely to be thrown together in society, better accommodate ourselves with a good grace to the evil.'

Recalling to mind his former often-repeated charges to her to avoid all intercourse with the Normans, Matilda's countenance

expressed unqualified surprise.

"No need of perpetuating grievances," said Sir Richard, replying to her looks. "It will be an advantage hereafter to the children to be on good terms with the various branches of the family; more especially to Walter, who has so much to appre-

hend from their animosity.

Carefully as Matilda was now schooling herself to place the children upon a par in her estimation of their rights, if not in her personal affection, it startled her when she found Sir Richard thus undisguisedly advocating the interests of the foundling. It must, of course, be so. The adoption could not be made by halves. Still, she wondered that his heart's blood stirred not more warmly towards the little Constance,—her own image, his own offspring,—than towards the child of some Parisian outcast, the child of shame, the child of sin.

It was no small aggravation of her momentary pique, that Walter's future interests required her to sacrifice her repugnance, and accept in good part the advances of Lady Catherine. Though Matilda's nature was ill qualified to form an accurate estimation of the odiousness of such a woman, she experienced involuntary disgust whenever she found herself in company with the intrigante. The glittering exterior of the serpent was almost as distasteful, as would have been the latent venom she had not the science to decompose. Lady Catherine's unwomanly hardness, her sneers at everything good and virtuous, her innate, ingrained, intolerant, and intolerable worldliness, filled poor Matilda's heart with uneasy feelings when tête-à-tête with the Pythoness of Carlton House. She longed to escape to Selwood Manor, and the honest family circle which Christmas was

to bring around her.

On the eve, however, of her departure for Worcestershire, Sir Richard urged her to fulfil a long-standing engagement to visit the theatre, and enjoy for the first time one of the exquisite and feminine performances of Miss O'Neill, then in the zenith of her fame. The "Dawlish set" affected to trace a likeness between Matilda and that charming actress; one of Lady Catherine's standing jests in Paris, when her fair rival appeared in society, attired in a black velvet dress that dis-played to peculiar advantage the fairness of her hair and complexion, being to exclaim, as she entered the room, "Here comes Isabella, or the Fatal Marriage!"

On repairing to the theatre, it appeared that it was the royal box they were to occupy, under favour of Lady Catherine. Instead of the enjoyment she had anticipated, the tittletattle of the party did not suffer five minutes' interruption, to admit of her appreciating the performances. Instead of compassionating her sympathy with the stage, Lady Norman's tears seemed only to stimulate the activity of their senseless prattle.

At length, Sir Richard, out of patience with their ill-breeding, rose and quitted the box; and no sooner had he taken refuge in some quieter seat, than the real purpose of their visit to the theatre became apparent. From that moment, there was not even a pretence at interest in the woes of Isabella, or the

wrongs of Biron.

"I have some papers here, my dear Lady Norman, which I wish you to look over," said Lady Catherine, drawing a packet from the embroidered bag which it was the fashion of that day to drag about. "Or rather (as you have little taste, I fancy, for genealogies and patents) which I want you to recommend to the attention of Sir Richard."

"If they relate in any way to the affairs of the late Mr. Norman," observed Matilda, drawing back, "pray say nothing to him on the subject. All former animosities are extinguished.

It would surely be injudicious to rake them up."

"I should scarcely describe them as relating to the affairs of the late Mr. Norman," replied Lady Catherine, with contempt. "With his trading interests, we have ceased to entertain the slightest concern. But they relate to a matter in which he is represented by my husband. Mr. Norman's claims dying with him are, of course, vested in Giles."

Metilal leaked regulated and was about to turn every in the

Matilda looked puzzled, and was about to turn away in the hope of being allowed to bestow her attention on the sorrows of the wretch "who should have died at Candy;" when Lady Catherine began to enter into a thousand circumstantialities

relating to the Woodchurch peerage.

"But since Mr. Norman, as representative of this Jeffrey Norman, Lord Woodchurch, is entitled to the barony, of what service can be the concurrence of my husband?" demanded the simple-hearted Matilda.

"Of no real service. But it will have a better appearance

that the family should be unanimous."

"Sir Richard can have no motive to dispute the rights of Mr. Norman, more than those of any other person," replied Matilda. "But he has no parliamentary interest, and will, I fear, be of little use."

"As to interest," said Lady Catherine, glancing towards Lady Dawlish, "our cause is safe enough. All I wish to be assured is, that we shall meet with no opposition from any

member of the family."

"I will give the papers and your message to Sir Richard," replied Matilda, eager to dismiss the business, "and leave him

to discuss the matter with Mr. Norman."

But throughout the evening, though the question of peerages and genealogies was carefully avoided, the influence of her views concerning both was visible in every word uttered by Lady Catherine. She seemed smitten with a sudden rapture of enthusiasm for the beauty of Sir Richard's person, and the endowments of his mind; protested, that till the previous day in the park, she had never happened to notice his admirable air when witching the world with noble horsemanship, nor, till Lady Dawlish's dinner-party, the superiority of his talents. The lady who prevented Napoleon's courtiers from discussing the symmetry of the Emperor's hand by exclaiming, "a truce to politics," might have parried the flatteries of Lady Catherine by observing, "Wait till the petition is before the house!"

On their return home, Sir Richard received from his weary wife an account of her mission, and the papers, which she promised to return in his name to Lady Catherine Norman, if he

did not choose to be at the trouble of examination.

"Not examine them?" oried he, entering with ardour into the cause. "You cannot suppose that I am going to take those people's word concerning this Woodchurch peerage? It may turn out of high importance to Walter! I shall sift the affair with the greatest nicety. I remember hearing the Abbé O'Donnel mention that my father always conceived himself to be the head of the Woodchurch branch of the family."

"But Lady Catherine insinuates, that it is only through her family interest that the title is likely to be revived in their favour; and that for any other branch, nothing would be

available."

"Then I am convinced my claims are as good as theirs!" cried Sir Richard. "She would not have held out that intimation, unless for purposes of discouragement. Give me the roll of papers. I will examine them before I sleep this night."

After being talked to death for the last five hours, your mind is surely not in a state to form an accurate judgment,

observed Lady Norman.

"I shall lay the case before the accurate judgment of the first genealogists of the day," replied her husband. "All I would ascertain to-night is, the extent of Lady Catherine's audacity in attempting to cant me out of my family rights.'

And in spite of his fatigues, Sir Richard remained till morning poring over the papers injudiciously committed to his hands; and was ultimately so convinced of the priority of his claims, that, after allowing himself only an hour or two for repose, he posted off in search of the eminent lawyer to whose

consideration he had determined to refer the case.

"The question scarcely admits of dispute, as a matter of right," was the answer given, on a cursory view of the documents. "What it may become as a matter of favour, is another thing. The petitioning party must have tolerable reliance on the strength of their parliamentary interest, to fancy the Lords would confirm so halting a claim as the best which, even if

unopposed, they seem prepared to make out."
Sir Richard returned from this legal interview in the highest spirits. Snatching little Walter upon his knee at dessert, he drank to him as the future Lord Woodchurch. He seemed to exult in the idea of this new aggrandization, chiefly for the sake of the boy; and informed Lady Norman that so necessary did he consider it to be on the spot to assist the researches of his legal adviser, and reply to the proposals of the Normans, that it would be impossible for him to accompany her the following day to Selwood Manor.

With a thousand apologies and excuses for this resolution, he entreated Matilda to make excuses to her family for the duty towards his "children," which rendered it incumbent on him to despatch her alone into Worcestershire, to do the honours of

Selwood Manor.

CHAPTER XXI.

That for thy mother's fault art thus expos'd To loss and what may follow. Weep I cannot, But my heart bleeds; and most accurs'd am I, To be by oath enjoin'd to this!

SHAKSPEARE.

No triumphal arches, no flags, no garlands, awaited little Constance Norman on her first arrival on the territory of her forefathers:—not even an exulting father to hold her up to the admiration of the village, as the carriage rolled through Selwood. But Matilda was too happy in the beauty and wellbeing of her unexpected treasure, to experience even a momentary pang of mortification. She was returning home, in safety and happiness, with her babe smiling at her bosom; and it became her not to lament either the presence of little Walter, or the absence of Sir Richard. It was vexatious to find that Mrs. Ravenscroft had quitted the village to spend her Christmas holidays at Tuxwell Park; and that four and twenty hours must elapse ere she had the joy of exhibiting the beauties of "Miss Norman" to eyes more discriminating than those of the purblind housekeeper and old family steward, who looked unlovingly upon its little heretic face. But next day, her family were to assemble; her grey-headed father, her happy brother and sister; bringing with them the strangers they were about to introduce to her affection.

The meeting was a joyous one on all sides. The little family party travelled together, and made their appearance within ten minutes of the appointed time. But even while admiring, at Matilda's suggestion, the beauties of her children, and offering their heartfelt greetings to herself, frowns overcast the brows of John Maule and Avesford, on learning the uncourteous absence of the master of the mansion; the one resenting the

insult for himself, the other, for his father.

"Tom Cruttenden prophesied that Sir Richard would not be on the spot to receive us!" mused old Maule. But he mused in silence; too deeply penetrated by the delight of folding a new generation of his descendants to his bosom to murmur at trivial grievances. The poor old man fancied that the instincts of nature were stirring powerfully within him, as he laid his hand in benediction upon the head of the heir of Selwood; and assured Matilda that he could trace in the boy's dark eyes a strong resemblance to her brother William.

"The girl is a pretty babe enough," said the old gentleman, glancing carelessly at Constance. "But you musn't expect me, my dear, to think so much of her as of Walter. Your son's a noble little fellow, Matty; and I love him the more for reminding me so strongly of poor Bill. Missy is fair, you see, and less like the Maule part of the family. Missy, I warrant, is the image of some of the Normans who, if I'm to judge by their portraits in the gallery, were most of them sallow-faced bodies."

"Surely I must have been once as fair as Constance?"

pleaded Matilda, piqued for the honour of her babe.

"To be sure you were, my dear; you took after your mother's relations; you never bore the least resemblance to your brothers

and sisters.

Lady Norman interrupted a discussion interesting only to her father and herself, to explain, to the best of her power, the urgency of the business which detained her husband in town. But though they laboured to look policely convinced of the necessity for his absence, an irrepressible glance of incredulity was visible in the intelligent countenance of the young mer-

chant.

John Maule and his wife were sober, steady, serious people, attached to their tranquil routine of life; who, regarding their journey into Worcestershire as a sacrifice made to the wishes of the old gentleman, were rather glad than sorry to be spared the additional exertions that must have arisen from the presence of Sir Richard. The husband, after renouncing his father's noisy calling, and betaking himself to the Church as the quietest of the learned professions, had selected his wife as the most silent young lady of his acquaintance; intending to pass through life in methodical obscurity, discharging the duties of a parish priest in their narrowest acceptation; i. e., officiating in the parish church one hundred and ten times in the course of the year, and reading family prayers in his own parlour seven hundred and thirty. His parsonage was neat and trimly to a miracle. A Dutch excess of cleanliness caused the furniture to shine, the grates to glitter, the shaven lawn and closely-trimmed espaliers to put forth their monotonous verdure. His parishioners rarely called forth his reproofs, unless by disorderliness in their persons, or untidiness in their households; and his favourites in the village were supposed to shave or whitewash, sweep or garnish their way to the parson's good graces. If cleanliness, according to the proverb, be secondary only to godliness, John Maule was a semi-saint after his kind. Circumscript in understanding and unexpansive in affections, he was content to take Selwood as he found it; regretting only that so extensive and well-wooded a park could not by any expenditure of old women and besoms, be delivered from the disfigurement of its withered leaves.

The methodical parson and his shy, nervous, little wife were very different beings from the sensible Elizabeth, and her firm, strong-minded husband. While John Maule complimented Lady Norman upon her looks, and thought it wonderful she should look so young and pretty after being racketed all over Europe, and exposed to the inconvenience of sea-voyages and land-journeys almost as harassing and distracting as the uproar of Cruttenden Maule's Birmingham manufactory, Charles Avesford considered it far more extraordinary that she should preserve such cheerful spirits, after spending fourteen years in company with an ill-tempered, disagreeable man; useless in his generation, yet as proud of himself as if he lived to confer benefits upon mankind.

Matilda, meanwhile, though grieved to notice the declining health of her father, and find her brother married to a nonentity, soon began to experience that happy frame of feeling arising from a family reunion after long sojourn in a land of strangers. There were distant kindred to be inquired for, of whose names for years she had heard no mention; there were entertaining anecdotes to be listened to, of the increasing eccentricities of Tom Cruttenden and young Crutt., related with good-humoured drollery by Avesford. There was a description of Fern Hill to be extracted from Elizabeth, and an account of John's parsonage—" small certainly, but singularly commodious"—interrupted by little agitated allusions from Mrs. Maule to their prospect of an early removal to Woldham Rectory.

Matilda listened, pleased to find them all so happy in their lot; and gratified in turn by her sympathy, every heart warmed towards her. Before dinner was over, all present felt that it was a family-party. In spite of the massive plate, stately liveries, and august dining-room, they forgot that their dear Matty was Lady Norman of Selwood Manor, with a chance of being shortly saluted as the lady of the Right Honourable Lord

Woodchurch.

To herself all was sunshine, thus surrounded by those to whom she knew herself to be an object of pride and affection, till the moment of dessert, when it was the custom of Sir Richard, as of all partial parents, for Walter to make his appearance. Matilda had not dared revoke, during her husband's absence, the order for Master Norman's joining the party; and he was accordingly paraded by Ghita to the head of the table, and greeted with caresses by the guests. As the Italian stooped to draw a chair for her charge, her eyes unfortunately encountered those of her lady; and Matilda read, or fancied she read there, pity and contempt for her hypocrisy, in accepting for the alien the tenderness of her poor old, white-Her hireling seemed to be rejoicing in the headed father. consciousness of moral superiority.

That moment, the happy family meeting forfoited its charm

in the eyes of Lady Norman. Instead of feeling proud of welcoming her father, sister, and brother, under her roof, and evincing her affection for them in presence of their new connexions, she was conscious only that they were sitting at the board of a deceiver, and that their honest hearts and blameless lives were insulted by the collusion. It was not the high-born wealthy baronet's wife doing the honours of his family mansion to the manufacturer, the merchant, the village priest; it was the forsworn evil-doer, sitting at meat with those whose souls disdained an untruth; and who would have recoiled from the commission of an act such as she had dishonouraby adventured.

When the generous wine sparkled in the trembling hand of old Maule, in a crystal goblet engraved with the armorial bearings of the Normans, he exclaimed, "Toasts, they tell me, are old-fashioned things; but I must have one to-day. Here's a health to my grandson! Here's health and prosperity to the heir of Selwood!" And while his son and son-in-law pledged him in hearty bumpers, Elizabeth, leaning across her husband, grasped with affectionate pressure the hand of her

sister.

"May he live to be a blessing to you!" said Mrs. Avesford, ere she raised the glass to her lips; while Matilda, pale and trembling, had not courage to bid the smiling boy embrace his grandfather and aunt. Her mind was absorbed in the painful reflection, that of her own fair girl, in whose veins alone their

kindred blood was flowing, no one uttered a syllable.

Nor were her sufferings diminished by the child-like questionings of little Walter concerning his new relatives. "Are you my mamma's papa? Are you my mamma's brothers and sisters? Why are you not so pretty as she is? What made you come here? When are you going away?" and so forth. But for the readiness of Avesford, who saw from the variations of Lady Norman's countenance that something was amiss, though he could not divine the cause of her disturbance, the boy would have continued to pursue his awkward interrogatories unanswered.

"We are come here that you may show us Selwood Manor-House, and park, and village," said he, to the indulged little fellow. "And in return, you shall come and see me, Walter; and I will show you ships and sailors, and the beautiful birds

and shells they bring from distant countries.'

The child's attention thus attracted, he was soon established on Avesford's knee, asking a thousand questions, and unfolding the little budget of his own travelling reminiscences; but it was not till he retired for the night that Matilda became restored to her wonted composure.

A week had been originally fixed for the duration of the visit; and Lady Norman trusted that, in a day or two, Sir Richard would be released from his London engagements to admit of the christening of her child taking place during their stay. For to have the ceremony performed during her husband's absence was a thing not to be thought of. Extended intercourse with the world had done little to detach the heart of that gentle wife and mother from its chartered affections. The first object of her life was still the froward husband, by whose all-potent influence she had been swayed to wrong; the second, the little creature, the flower springing to adorn her autumnal day, which she trusted was to unite them in closer affection. In former days, indeed, she had believed want of offspring to be the solitary cause of their estrangement; and if now the birth of Constance failed to knit anew the slackened ties of his early love, it could only be occasioned by the interposition of the young Ishmael she had fostered under her roof.

Matilda felt it her duty to omit no occasion of awakening the parental instincts of Norman in favour of his daughter. His tenderness must be cultivated in behalf of Constance; he must be allowed to omit no customary form of kindness; he must be present at her christening, though differing in ceremonial from those of his professed Church. Injudicious mother! who sought to impose the claims of her child as a tax upon the

feelings of her husband.

Two days, however, alone remained of their visit, and no Sir Richard made, or promised to make, his appearance. Elizabeth and Avesford settled it apart that he was an ill-bred, ill-conditioned being; an Ethiop unworthy to wear on his brow so rich a jewel as Matilda. But they accompanied Lady Norman with such pleased alacrity to visit the most striking spots of her picturesque neighbourhood, and the whole party seemed to enjoy themselves so much in viewing her schools and almshouses, the village being enlivened at that moment by its annual distribution of blankets and good cheer, that she fancied her husband's slight had been unfelt. John Maule and his wife were content with the calm monotony of Selwood, which they pronounced to be almost as quiet as their own parsonage, congratulating Matilda on being so little molested by the troublesome claims of a neighbourhood; and Avesford, though he preferred the busy prospects of his humbler domain to the boundless extent of indistinct landscape wearying the eye at the Manor, had taste and information to appreciate the value of its fine library, and interesting collection of works of art.

Old Maule, meanwhile, had other objects to absorb his attention. At once proud and fond of his grandchildren, he was never weary of being led about by young Norman to visit, in the park, his favourite pony,—in the gardens, his favourite seat,—in the house, the gallery containing his favourite suit of armour. Matilda almost trembled to see with what infatuation her father

was attaching himself to the boy.

"How amazed my friend Cruttenden would be, Matty, to see

you the mother of such a noble little fellow!" said he one evening to Lady Norman, after obtaining her promise that a first-rate artist should be engaged, at his expense, to make a portrait of his beautiful grandson. "Tom has not quite forgiven you, my dear, for not naming one of your children after him. I have a notion, however, he will remember your son handsomely in his will. All he has in the world is to go to my descendants; and as your brother Crutt. seems set against matrimony, and yours are at present the only young ones in the family, I shouldn't be surprised if the heir of Selwood were eventually to inherit as good a property from his mother as from all his grand ancestors put together. Girls are none the better for fortunes. It only makes them the prey of fortune-hunters. But we must see and do our best for Sir Walter Norman."

At Matilda's request, who began to suspect that her husband would prolong his sojourn in London as irregularly as he had formerly done in Paris, the little party agreed to remain an additional day at the Manor. Some time would probably elapse ere their return thither; and she felt less able than formerly to bear the isolation of a secluded life. Her rearing had been among the familiar and sociable. Her nature had not been trained for the aristocratic seclusion of Selwood. And now, alas! she had lost even the peace of mind which once rendered

solitude, if not delightful, supportable.

It was not the many-coloured scenery of the continent, or her recent gay associations in London, which inspired her with a dread of ennui during the absence of Sir Richard. The cheerful spirit of Avesford and the companionableness of his wife, rendered her deeply conscious of the blessing derivable from pleasant intercourse. In his happiest moods, the tone of Sir Richard's mind was pitched a key above or below her own. He was a casuist,—a theorist; unsympathizing with the march of mankind, or the homely interests of life. Egotism closes the human heart as effectually as misanthropy; and while the Avesfords were golden links in the mighty chain of humanity, despising nothing and nobody either agreeable or useful to their fellow-creatures, Sir Richard Norman surveyed the world with universal contempt.

Enchanted to find in Matilda a woman unspoiled by the world, sweet amid domestic bitterness, and humble amid a thousand incentives to arrogance and pretension, they gladly agreed to postpone their departure. But scarcely had the point been conceded, when, to the annoyance of the whole party, and the dismay of Matilda, Sir Richard Norman made his appearance. On her return from a drive with her father and the Avesfords (while John and his silent mate performed their daily constitutional round of the shrubberies), she was informed that her husband was in the library, and found him seated on the sofa, with

Walter upon his knee.

The greeting was constrained on both sides. The husband made no movement to join his guests; the wife dared not propose it. But as Matilda took a place silently by his side, he put down the boy, and extended his hand kindly towards her. Lady Norman now noticed in his appearance an air of languor and indisposition, inducing her to exclaim, "It was illness, then, and not business, that detained you in town? Dearest Norman, why did you not write me word that you were indisposed?"

"I have not been ill," he replied. "But a thousand untoward circumstances have occurred to thwart me. I delayed my return, therefore, till I thought I was to be alone with you. I

hoped these people would be gone!"

"They have only two more days to remain here," replied Matilda. "They are all anxious to return home. It was only as a concession to my earnest request that they agreed to stay

another day."

Sir Richard involuntarily shrugged his shoulders. Then, perceiving the mortified air which overspread the features of his wife, he added, "Forgive me, dearest Matilda! But, when vexed by the contrarieties of life, I cannot expect from others the indulgence I meet from yourself. I am just now so much out of sorts, as searcely to be fit society for those who have so

strong a claim on my attention.'

"Make me, at least, one promise," said Matilda, bitterly.
"My family have only twenty-four hours to remain under your roof. Treat them with the courtesy you bestow on strangers, and give them not reason to fear that our fireside is harassed by care. My father is old and ailing. Let him die in the cheering belief that his child is happy as she is prosperous. In the name of that boy," she continued, pointing to Walter, who, having slid from Sir Richard's knee, stood aloof, amusing himself with some childish pastime, "I require you to conduct yourself with kindness and consideration towards those who have never failed in kindness and consideration for you or yours."

Startled by this appeal, Sir Richard rose, took her arm under his, and proceeding at once to the drawing-room, welcomed every member of Matilda's family to his house with a grace and courtesy of high-breeding so like the Sir Richard Norman of other times, that Matilda was gratified to perceive how instantaneous an influence he was usurping over the feelings of Aves-

ford and her brother.

On retiring for the night, however, she was still more gratified to find the favourable impression reciprocal. Hitherto, her husband had come in contact only with the less-gifted members of her family; and the ill-timed lectures of his father-in-law, and obtrusive vulgarity of young Crutt., had not prepared him for the quiet gentlemanliness of John Maule, or the intelligent manliness of Avesford. Even the old man, as a doting grand-

father, was more bearable than as the automaton whose wires

were worked by Tom Cruttenden.

"Mrs. Avesford has been more fortunate than her sister, Matilda," said he, with a melancholy smile. "She has chosen a man of sense and education; with too much feeling to neglect her happiness, and too much principle to mislead her judgment. So much the better for all of us. Avesford may become a valuable counsellor to you and yours. It is a comfort to find him so superior a man."

What need have I of the advice of my sister's husband, while I am secure of yours?" demanded Matilda, with an

involuntary feeling of alarm.

"We are all mortal. I am ten years older than yourself. I have not accustomed you much to the exercise of your own judgment," said Norman, endeavouring to smile away the apprehensions he saw gathering in the countenance of his wife. "But be of good cheer, Matilda. I mean to live many years yet, to try your patience. Meanwhile, admit that Avesford is a fine, gentlemanly fellow, a pleasant inmate, and valuable addition to our family."

"So untrue is it that all men are equals," observes Dr. Johnson, "that no two men ever remained half an hour in each other's company without the one obtaining a superiority over

the other."

In the course of a single evening, Charles Avesford had obtained a decided ascendancy over his brother-in-law.

CHAPTER XXII.

I something do excuse the thing I hate For his advantage whom I dearly love. SHAESPEARE.

It was gratifying to the sisters to perceive, on the morrow, with what readiness their husbands fell into each other's society. Each was agreeably surprised in the qualities of the other; and Sir Richard experienced real delight in pointing out the natural beauties of his estate to one who had good taste to appreciate them, and in discussing its management with one who had valuable advice to bestow. They rode together over the park and home-farm of Selwood; and Elizabeth and Matilda exchanged glances on their return, implying a mutual conviction that their future intercourse would be such as they could desire.

Nevertheless, the quick-sighted Avesford had already discovered that all was not well with Sir Richard. In spite of his efforts to be companionable, and his desire to appear to advantage, it was plain that something hung heavy on the spirits of the baronet.

During the christening ceremony of the morning, he was almost as much affected by the sensible and impressive reading of John Maule, as Matilda had been by the same service performed at Farleigh Castle; and his deportment throughout the evening was so mild and depressed, so different from what the Avesfords were prepared to expect, that Elizabeth instinctively attributed his meekness to indisposition, and her husband, to mental affliction.

As they sat together after coffee, Elizabeth discussing with Sir Richard the probability that little Constance would grow up into a striking resemblance of her mother, Avesford suddenly interrupted them by remarking, "I don't doubt she will be pretty. But the boy is positively the finest fellow in England. We shall have a famous description to give of him to our neighbour Lady Audley. I believe, Sir Richard, she is a near connexion of yours?"

"A distant cousin," replied Sir Richard, greatly sur-

"She was a Norman, I think? 'Agatha Norman.' I remember seeing the name in an old music-book which she lent my wife."
"You are acquainted with her, then?"

"Sir Thomas is our nearest neighbour. Lady Audley's

society is a great acquisition to Bessy.

"But you do not always reside at Fern Hill?" inquired Sir Richard, as if the proximity of his cousin Agatha was no great incentive to the performance of his promise to take Matilda and the children, early in the summer, to visit the Avesfords.

"From May till November only. My house of business in Liverpool is a commodious family residence. We remain in the country only so long as the weather enables me to come

backwards and forwards.

"Perhaps, then," observed Sir Richard, "you will have no objection to extend your hospitality to us in April, instead of June? The scene at Liverpool would be a novelty to Matilda. She has never seen an English maritime city, or docks, or anything of the kind."

"No, no, no!" cried Avesford, laughing. "You shall drive over from Fern Hill and visit our lions. But it would not amuse you to find yourself running all day against trucks, bales, puncheons, jars, and chests. My counting-house and warehouses are immediately connected with my dwelling-house. I have often heard old Cruttenden describe the consternation of your looks when you were first introduced to the factory; and should feel vexed to see you disgusted by the stir and bustle that constitute my pride and glory. There is nothing interesting or picturesque in commercial details. Such things look well enough from the Rialto at Venice, or Mole at Genoa; but we Liverpool folks are plain matter-of-fact people."

"And the proudest people of my acquaintance, my dear Avesford!" observed John Maule, with a quiet smile. "I never met with so much etiquette and ostentation, except in a Cathedral Close, as when, two years ago, you introduced me to your thrones and dominions. In point of classical and literary taste, too, what city in the empire competes with

Liverpool?"

"We tried to astonish the country parson," said Avesford, good-humouredly. "We were afraid you should come the pedant over us, and forestalled you by coming the alderman and Roscoe over you! But joking apart, Sir Richard, you would enjoy yourself more at Fern Hill. The situation is beautiful, and the air singularly fine; to say nothing of the pleasure the Audleys would have in forming the acquaintance of their cousins."

"I know nothing of Lady Audley," said Sir Richard, stiffly. "I have not seen her since she was a child, and I, her father's

ward."

"She is a spirited, high-minded woman," said Avesford. "I am sure you would like her. Her brother, too, is a fine young man." " Lady Audley has several brothers."

"I alluded to Rupert Norman, who spent several months with the Audleys, last year. He is partner in a house of business at Trieste, trading largely with Liverpool; and took the opportunity of having affairs to settle among us, to bring over his Italian lady on a visit to his family."

Sir Richard Norman appeared so silently indifferent to the proceedings of this branch of her family, that Matilda, who had been hitherto engaged in conversation with Mrs. Maule and her

father, thought it civil to interpose.

"Is Mrs. Rupert Norman a handsome woman?"

inquired.

'Strikingly handsome," replied Elizabeth, joining in the "The elder brother is married to a woman of rank. Of her, Lady Audley seems to know nothing. But she soon grew extremely attached to Benedetta. I cannot say I was very fond of her. There is something wild and fleroe about her eyes."

"Something Italian, perhaps?" observed Matilda.

"Italian, with a vengeance!" cried Avesford. 'souls made of fire, and children of the sun,' may be admirable among the decencies of private life. I stood in positive awe of Madame Norman; and have liked Audley Oaks much better since her departure."

"They are gone, then?" demanded Norman, who had borne

no part in the recent conversation.

"At Trieste, probably, by this time. They left Lancashire on a visit to their relations in the south."

And Sir Richard evincing no further curiosity on the subject,

the discussion fell to the ground.

On parting finally from Mrs. Avesford on the morrow, Matilda felt ashamed to avow how likely she thought this unlucky neighbourship with the Audleys, to interrupt their projected intercouse.

"Charles and Sir Richard seem to have got on admirably together," was Elizabeth's remark on the subject. "It would be, in fact, difficult for Avesford's frank honest nature to give offence; and I cordially hope, dear sister, that for the rest of our lives, our families may remain on the happiest footing."

"God grant it!" exclaimed Lady Norman; "I have had more need of your affection, Bessy, than I have dared express. Henceforward, though I may not need, I shall truly enjoy it."

To the whole party, Sir Richard Norman's parting greetings were kind and courteous. He spoke confidently to Avesford of a visit to Liverpool, in the spring; and cheerfully assured old Maule that there was not the slightest chance of the Selwood family again quitting England.
"You see," observed the old gentleman, in extenuation of

his pertinacity on the subject, "I bore but ill the thoughts of Matty's going abroad, when you last left us. But now, I shouldn't be easy in heart to lose sight of little Walter."

Matilda felt ashamed to meet the looks of her husband, immediately after being compelled to listen to these misplaced

expressions of tenderness.

"We must console ourselves with the reflection that the boy is a source of unmixed delight to him," was Lady Norman's faintly uttered comment; fancying from the depressed air of her husband, after the departure of their guests, that his conscience

stood as deeply rebuked as her own.

But Norman's thoughts were elsewhere. A far more painful blow had recently distressed him. On expressing to his cousin (or rather to Lady Catherine, his cousin's stronger half) a determination to prosecute his claim to the Woodchurch peerage, he had been informed that, as it could only be conceded as a matter of favour, his proceedings would be injurious to others, without proving beneficial to himself; and on his persisting, in spite of this warning, to give notice of an intended petition, he received a verbal intimation from Lady Catherine that she thanked him, at least, for taking so much trouble about a title which, after all, was likely to descend to her son.

all, was likely to descend to her son.

"Your life is as good as ours," said she, infuriated out of all self-control, on finding that Sir Richard was in possession of the documents necessary to secure the claim. "Enjoy if or your time, therefore, and welcome. But remember, that (unless Lady Norman should have a son) it must eventually revert to

us."

To this startling allusion, uttered from her carriage-window, in presence of the servants, as she happened to encounter Sir Richard at Lady Dawlish's door: he hazarded no reply. He dared not defy,—he would not concede. The slightest word or admission was fraught with peril. Hastening from the presence of the virago, he quitted town that night, to confer with Matilda as to the eligibility of putting forward pretensions likely to draw down upon him such terrible retaliation.

down upon him such terrible retaliation.

"I was in hopes," she replied, when Sir Richard laid the question before her, "that all misgivings had vanished from

Lady Catherine's mind."

"The information accidentally afforded me this morning by Avesford, of Rupert Norman's arrival in England and visit to Grove Park," he replied, "convince me that she has obtained ulterior information. We are, perhaps, more than ever in peril."

"But what can Mr. Norman of Trieste know upon the sub-

ject more than herself?"

"No matter. Be satisfied that either from him or others, she

has gained fatal intelligence!"

"But when Lady Audley learns from my sister with what

enthusiastic affection the boy is loved amongst us?" observed

Matilda.

"The Avesfords' reports of your affection will surprise them. That is an advantage I had not contemplated," said Sir Richard.
"But it comes too late. I fear they are already masters of the truth.

"In that case," resumed Matilda, "on no account provoke them by claiming this unlucky peerage. To what good purpose will it avail? We are neither of us weak enough to have our

vanity elated by a mere change of title."
"Pardon me," replied Norman, "aristocratic ennoblement is a distinction which few men contemplate with indifference. And even, if philosophical on my own account, I am, I confess. ambitious for poor Walter."

"You would not, surely, place in the scale against your own interests and credit, the future fortunes of an alien; a being in whom we have no natural tie or kindred?" cried Matilda in

amazement.

"Once for all," rejoined Sir Richard, with one of his gloomy looks of former days, "know that I adhere to my original resolution concerning the boy. Once resolved on the adoption, I swore to love him as a father, and I have kept my word. Even had he turned out ill, he should still have claimed at my hands the portion of a son. But being, as he is, a glorious creature, endowed with every fair and excellent quality, no child of yours and mine will ever be dearer to me than Walter!"

"Then I must tell you," exclaimed Matilda, unable to silence the promptings of a mother's jealousy, "that I think you do injustice both to them and me!"

"God forbid, my dearest wife!" he replied, with great feeling. "But we are not masters of our predilections; and, rather than a hair of Walter's head should be injured, I would give up

this peerage to the Normans."

"If such be the worst excess into which your partiality is likely to betray you," said Matilda, "Constance and I have little to complain of. Renounce for his sake a dukedom if you will, and it will cause me no uneasiness. But let me not suppose your own trueborn offspring superseded in your affection by—"
"Not a word disparaging to Walter!" interrupted Norman,

with a look of anguish.
"You are too hasty," was the gentle rejoinder of his wife.
"I was going to say, by one whom I truly and dearly love, except when I regard him as the successful rival of my child!"

Relieved of one ground of anxiety by Matilda's indifference to worldly distinctions, Norman resolved to renounce all active measures in the Woodchurch affair. Time enough to put in a protest should Giles Norman hazard a petition.

Sir Richard soon found, however, that pretensions to peerages are not to be snatched up and laid down at the instigation of

personal caprice. No secrecy having been enjoined on the subject in the first instance, Matilda, by way of extenuating her husband's prolonged stay in town, had mentioned to her friends at Farleigh Castle the motive of his delay; and the earl (an old gentleman who had survived almost everything but adoration of his order, and a peculiar code of polity whose table of pre-cedence descended from the Divinity straight to the anointed king of England, and from the anointed king of England to his peers) was elated by the idea of so vast an addition to the social dignity of his neighbourhood. He respected Sir Richard Norman greatly, as an old baronet; and felt that he should respect him fifty times more as representative of one of the barons of Magna Charta.

"Renounce the claim!" cried the old lord, on learning his determination. "That would be letting I dare not wait upon I would' most shamefully! Why, my daughter Emily understood from Lady Norman that you had obtained from the Heralds' Office the utmost encouragement and support?"

"And so I have," replied Sir Richard, calmly.

"Yet you are content to give up your pretensions? My dear

Sir Richard, I won't believe it of you."

"The thing cannot be done without considerable trouble

and expense," argued Norman.
"And is it not worth trouble and expense, my dear sir? What trouble and expense do not people incur to secure even one of your bran-new patents; and yours would date, I fancy, from 1203! Bless my soul! I would expend half my fortune

to establish my right to such a creation."

"It might be worth your lordship's while," observed Sir chard. "Your son is in Parliament, and will perhaps hereafter obtain the lieutenancy of the county. Under such circumstances, I admit that an ancient English peerage is a better thing than an Irish earldom. But to a Roman Catholic like myself, earldoms or baronies are alike indifferent. I live on my own land, neither a courtier nor a politician. Precedence is immaterial in a career so obscure as mine. I know the validity of my claims; and it is but an injustice the more on the part of the legislature, that I find myself excluded from my rightful place in the Upper House."

"Pardon me," said the old nobleman. "If you do not take the measures indispensable to establish your pretensions-

"Do not, my dear lord, attempt to aggravate my political discontents, by inspiring me with bootless ambition," interrupted Sir Richard. "Suffice it, that I am restless and aspiring for my party. For my own share, suffer me to retain my self-satisfied obscurity."

"I would rather reverse the case; and see you an agitator on your own account than on that of the Catholics," replied the "On that score, my prejudices are old lord, with a smile.

undiminished. Yet I cannot, in conscience, blame you for wishing to take an active part in the business of the country; since half my own time is spent in inciting my son to similar aspiration. How can we be surprised, I ask, at the growing influence of the democratic party in this country, when young men of family, having an important stake in the country, resign themselves, like Selsdon, to field-sports one half the year, and sluggardry the other?"

"We are not surprised," replied Sir Richard. "Our hopes, as you are aware, derive daily strength from the growing influence of liberal opinions; the natural emanation of those middle classes whom I fear your lordship is apt to designate as

the democratic party."

"You do me injustice," replied Lord Farleigh. "And you are equally unjust towards yourself, by affecting to take your place with the popular faction. Except on the single point of Emancipation, your principles must necessarily be conservative. Nothing can be more absurd than to persist in ranging the political parties of this country under the two exploded banners of Whig and Tory. The exigencies of the times and the march of society have created a hundred political sects. You might as accurately divide religious parties at the present day into Jews and Gentiles."

"I so far agree with you," replied Norman, "that, though the Whig party must ever hold the strongest claims on the gratitude of the present generation of Roman Catholics, yet, when half a century of civil equality shall have obliterated the rancour of religious animosities, it will probably be with the Conservative party that the higher class of Roman Catholics are found amalgamated. A far-sighted Tory leader, anticipating this, may, perhaps, be the person to break our chains, and enable the enfranchised to strengthen his own forces."

Lord Farleigh shrugged his shoulders. "I have ceased to form political prognostications," said he, "from premises altogether unprecedented. But, as I daily assure my son, these are no times to slumber by the fireside. Those who love their

country should be up and doing!"

Such were precisely the opinions which Sir Richard had heard a few days before from the lips of Avesford. The Liverpool merchant, and the Worcestershire Magnat, were necessarily of opposite factions; looking upon the state of parties, the one from the ascending, the other from the descending scale. But both were equally aware that a power-engine was in operation, to supersede the mouldy mill-wheels and lumbering looms of what are called the good old times. There existed, in fact, more sympathy between them than between the conscientious Conservatism of Lord Farleigh, and the narrow, though daring doctrines of high Toryism, gabbled by Lady Dawlish's set.

Had it not been for the ready attention of Lady Emily, who had attained the age when the noses of superannuated young ladies wax red after dinner and their conversation blue, Lord Farleigh would seldom have found an auditor for his political Jeremiads. But his daughter listened respectfully, and replied consolingly, whereas Lord Selsdon cared far more for his stud

and kennel, than for the debates of both their houses.

Though a well-disposed young man, the future Earl of Farleigh presented a striking specimen of the evil results of an English education, as per custom established. Lord Selsdon, after spending eight years, and five thousand pounds, at Eton and Oxford, had learnt nothing but "words, words, words!" Drilled from form to form, through the routine of the classics, and having divided his time at the University between claret and algebra, he was as ignorant as a ploughboy of the rudiments of available human knowledge. Nevertheless, as Lord Selsdon happened to fall short of libertinism, he passed current in his easte, as a good sportsman and excellent fellow. Content, like the sloth, to fatten on his own substance without regard for the leanness of his fellow-creatures, he gave fifty pounds at Christmas to the poor of his parish, by way of atonement for adding, as nightly divisions, his vote to the list of those who ground their bones for bread, by maintaining erying abuses.

Lady Farleigh, who had exhorted the tutor of her only son to teach him to eschew dangerous vices and vulgar errors, and who fancied that, in marrying him at an early age to an accomplished young lady of domestic habits she had secured his days to be long in the land, and a comfort to her old age, little suspected his deficiency in the lefty virtues incumbent on his high estate as a maker of the laws, a moulder of the times, a guardian of the liberties of the nation. She appreciated not the errors of existing systems as exemplified in her own family. She did not perceive that (unless the vulgar daring of sportsmanship be held a sufficient evidence of manliness) she had made an old woman of her son; or that, by immuring the stately girl-hood of her daughter from all chance of a marriage of inclination, she had thrown her riper years into the avocations of the opposite sex; that Lady Emily should have been Lord Selsdon, and Lord Selsdon, Lady Emily.

"How shall I like London?" inquired Lady Selsdon of Matilda, when they met at Farleigh Castle, previous to the annual break-up of the different families of the neighbourhood. "Selsdon's return to parliament will be gazetfed on Saturday; and Lord Farleigh insists on our going to town next week."

"You will meet with a thousand things to gratify you," replied Lady Norman, unwilling to damp the expectations of

her young friend.

"But poor mamma will find the spring so long!" said Sophy,

dolefully. "Last year, she was constantly coming over to Tuxwell."

"We were all so happy there! The air agreed so well with

Louisa; and Selsdon is so fond of his farm!"

"He will find new interests in his new duties," observed

Lady Norman.

"He has not the least turn for politics!" replied Sophy. "But supposing he were to get bitten like the rest, what will become of me while he is passing day after day, and night after night, in the House of Commons?"

"You have so many pursuits to occupy your time, my dear

Sophia."
"Indeed, I have not! Who can go on practising and drawing, with no one to stimulate or applaud? I have given up all that sort of thing. Selsdon does not like to find me engrossed by such nonsense. He says, there is something girlish and pitiful in mere accomplishments."

"You have the more leisure, then, for reading."

"Solitary reading makes one feel so lonely. I seldom read, unless to Selsdon; when he wants to be kept awake after dinner."

"At all events," said Matilda, "in London, you will be surrounded by family friends and new acquaintances; and make many gay engagements!

"Selsdon detests balls and parties; and I shall have no

courage or inclination to go out without him.

This was a dilemma in which Matilda could sympathise. have never passed what is called a season in town," said she. "But it strikes me that, without troubling yourself too much with the dissipations of the world---"

"Dearest Lady Norman, for mercy's sake do not encourage this sister of mine to become so mere a drone!" interrupted Lady Emily, who sat impatiently by, listening to their conversation. "Sophy has a world of business on her hands. She has not yet been presented. She has not yet been introduced to our numerous family connexions. She has done nothing, and has everything to do. If Selsdon and Sophy had their own way, they would never stir from Tuxwell, till they came to take possession of Farleigh Castle; nor ever stir from Farleigh Castle, till they went to take possession of the family vault. Is this the purpose of their existence? Is the position of such a family as ours, in society, to be wholly lost? Is its next generation to turn out a race of rustics?"

"Do not waste your eloquence, dear Emily, or make yourself uneasy," said the good-humoured Sophia. "Selsdon is preparing to obey his father's commands and follow your advice, with a good grace. A house is engaged for us. He has promised me the alternate weeks of an opera box; and Lady

Farleigh is to present me at the first drawing-room."

"Come, this looks well," cried Lady Emily. "Mrs. Ravenscroft has fulfilled her promise of interposing her good advice."

"Mamma seems to think it indispensable we should see more of the world," sighed Sophy. "As if anything was likely to make us happier than at Tuxwell!"

"Very disinterested on the part of Mrs. Ravenscroft,"

observed Matilda.

"Poor dear mamma!" moaned Lady Selsdon.

"We shall do our best to make her happy during your absence," said Lady Norman, kindly. "It is my duty to repay the kindness she formerly showed me during my widow-hood at the Manor."

"How dull it used to be for you at the Manor, in those days!" exclaimed Lady Selsdon. "How different you must find it

now, with the children to occupy your attention!"

"They are not old enough yet to occupy her attention," said Lady Emily, anxious to discourage her sister-in-law from sinking into a nursery dawdler. "They are at present no companions for Lady Norman. Their education cannot have

begun."

Emily sees nothing in children but education blocks," exclaimed Lady Selsdon. "My dear sister, you know no more about the companionableness of children, than Iofship-building. It is precisely because their education has not commenced, that they are charming. An untaught child is a creature that has nothing to do but love its mother from morning till night. Do try to make her understand the difference between a mother's feelings and those of a schoolmistress," continued Sophy, appealing to Lady Norman. "Tell her what you feel when your boy is racing before you in the garden, or jumping on your knee to be praised and caressed. Tell her what joy you have in his movements,—his words,—his looks; how you delight to hang over him in his sleep, or hail his waking. Tell her how sensible you are to his lightest touch—his faintest breath. None but a mother, dear Lady Norman, can explain all this."

But Matilda knew not how to reply to such an appeal, with

Walter as the exemplification.

"Speak to her for me," persisted Sophy, taking the hand of her friend. "For so long as I attempt to describe my feelings, she does but accuse me of weakness. All, and more than all, I feel for my little Louisa, you have experienced for your beautiful Walter."

"Well, well, in time you will become more rational," said Lady Emily, indulgently. "In London, the company of men and women will perhaps inspire you with a taste for something

beyond the nursery."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Lui-même de nos jours avait mêlé la trame. Sa vie était ma vie,-et son âme mon âme LA MARTINE.

ONE of the most laborious parliamentary efforts of Lord Selsdon's maiden-session was, to defraud his Majesty's government of twenty pence per diem, by franking a letter from Sophy to Selwood-cottage, acquainting mamma with the progress of Miss Louisa's teething; and receiving to his address, in return, a letter from Selwood-cottage to Sophy, acquainting her with the state of her mamma's health, and the news of the village.

Selwood, meanwhile, afforded little variety to diversify Mrs.

Ravenscroft's correspondence.

During the absence of the Normans on the continent, only two changes had occurred in the neighbourhood; the establishment of some extensive iron-works at the old forge at Avonwell, and the conversion of a certain Scarwell farm into Scarwell-park. An estate half way between the Manor and Farleigh Castle had been purchased by a retired upholsterer from Bath; who, having expended fifty of his hundred thousand pounds in the purchase, and wasted thirty more in building a stuccoed eastle on the spot and converting a pretty trout-stream into a sleepy lake, found it impossible to keep it up on the interest of the remaining twenty. The estate was, therefore, under the hammer of that remarkable professor of rhetoric. George Robins.

It was of the Normans, therefore, that Mrs. Ravenscroft was

chiefly moved to write.

"You would scarcely know Lady Norman!" wrote Mrs. Ravenscroft. "She has turned out as fond a mother as we used tormerly to think her an adoring wife. Her baby is always in the drawing-room when I call at the Manor, and accompanies her in all her drives and walks. Like yourself, dearest Sophy, she seems to think a girl a prize worth a thousand boys; for I never noticed any of these violent demonstrations of tenderness towards Walter. Perhaps she considers the idolatry of Sir Richard enough to spoil him.

"The young heir of Selwood, however, is likely to be a prodigy. A certain Mr. Manningham has just arrived, to be his tutor. Sir Richard speaks of him as an admirable scholar, and Matilda not at all; from which I infer that he is as great a gene to her as we used to fancy old O'Donnel. But she is too happy now

with her little Constance, to care for old abbés."

Of the maternal partiality noticed by her worthy neighbour, Matilda was of course as little conscious as human beings usually are of their foibles. From the moment of the fatal fault into which she had been betrayed, she had felt herself unworthy the favour of Providence; and when, after all these trials and anxieties, she found herself at last the mother of a being whose birth conveyed no especial reproach to her partner in crime, the floodgates of Matilda's heart were opened, and she loved as never mother loved before. Lady Norman would have blushed had any rational being witnessed the extravagant caresses which, when alone, she lavished on her little nursling. She now saw what a feeling of insecurity had always mingled in her caresses of the adopted child! Walter might be at any time claimed and estranged from them; a creature whom others had a right to love better than herself. But her little fair smiling girl was all her own,—exclusively her own,—for life,—

for death,—for eternity!

If Matilda remained blind to her self-exposure in all this, Sir Richard was an observant spectator of her weakness. He now beheld unveiled the passionate depths of her soul. He saw how she could love: what lustre the excitement of this new feeling of maternal tenderness could lend to her eyes; what sweetness to her tone,—what vigour to her step. She was at once seftened and strengthened by her position as a mother. She was more sensitive, more firm. On all points relating to

Constance, she had a will and opinion of her own.

Sir Richard was half disposed to be jealous of his little girl: jealous for himself, still more jealous for Walter. "The poor boy was never cared for thus!" he would say, on noticing some excess of maternal vigilance. "Every one must perceive the difference you make between your little girl and our

boy!'

Mortified at the expression that seemed to disclaim on his own part all portion in his daughter, Matilda would not stoop to defend herself; and when he announced that his new chaplain was engaged to undertake the charge of Walter's education, Lady Norman renewed her offence, by expressing vehement satisfaction that Walter was to be placed under the hands of a tutor.

"I never doubted that you would be glad to get rid of him

out of the nursery," angrily observed her husband.

"On the contrary, his little gambols amuse the baby. Nurse will be sorry to lose him," replied Matilda.

"I was not thinking of the nurse or the baby: I was think-

ing of yourself!"

"I agree with you, then, that he is become too headstrong for pettionat government. When you were tracing, the other day, Lord Selsdon's unenergetic character to the bad system of his education, I could not help thinking it would be an advantage to Walter to have a rational companion to answer his

questions, and lay the foundation of a good education."

"I admit that you find very little time to increase his stock of information," observed Sir Richard. "But you will be troubled with him no further. I have ordered apartments to be prepared for him and Ghita, next to the chaplain's rooms. They will form an establishment apart."

"Do you think it wise," demanded Matilda, startled by this arrangement, "to establish such complete disunion between the

children?"

"You were the first to establish it. But the more marked your alienation from Walter, the greater will be the reparation

urged by my conscience."

"My want of kindness and affection for the little fellow will impose no great tax upon your sense of justice," was Lady Norman's mild reply. "But unable to instruct him in the principles of the faith he is to profess, I rejoice that you have found

a tutor qualified for the important duty."

By this view of the case, the wrath of Sir Richard was appeared; nor could Matilda but triumph in the recollection of her father's recent remark, when careasing young Norman, "Ay, ay, little man! make as much as you will of me now. No fear of the jaws of the young crocodile. Till you get among the Jesuits and begin to spend your time in paternosters, you are of my own flesh and blood. By and by, things may after. I won't answer for being half so fond of you, when you've been taught all the ugly lessons in store for the heir of Selwood!"

"And now," thought Lady Norman, "now that those lessons are beginning, my father will do involuntary justice to my child! When we meet again, Constance will become his favourite; and as soon as she begins to notice him,—to speak,—to rnn about,—he will find that, instead of resembling the family portraits he dislikes so much, the little creature is the

image of his once-loved Matilda."

But while Mrs. Ravenscroft and others noted with satisfaction the happy change in her mode of life, Matilda noted with pain that her husband, though no longer surly with herself, was more subject than ever to starts of passion. The delight which, on his return from the continent, he had taken in Walter, and in Selwood, for Walter's sake, though keen and vivid as ever, was sometimes overcast with clouds that "came like shadows," but did not "so depart." They bequeathed a lasting injury to his constitution; and left a painful impression on the minds of these with whom he associated. The servants grew afraid of their master. The tenants were careful never to address him except through the medium of the steward. Even Mr. Manningham owed his security from hasty and groundless reproof to the paneply of his sacred calling. There was not a creature in the neighbourhood but was conscious of

the irritability which had formerly been visible only to the

gentle Matilda.

Most of these casual observers attributed his disturbance of mind to deranged health. A few beheld in it only the violence of temper engendered by egotism, and fostered by indulgence. But to Matilda's eyes, the veil was drawn aside. She saw the secret ulceration of his soul. She knew that he lived in a constant state of self-accusation, and (since the dark hints thrown out by Lady Catherine Norman) a constant dread of exposure.

There was nothing just then stirring in the country to divert his sickly fancies. The meeting of parliament had carried off the Farleigh Castle party and the scanty remnant of their neighbours; and the minor objects appealing to his attention, were connected with the improvement of his estate or embellishment of his house, and consequently with the hazards of its

inheritance.

"If, after all," said he, after one day inspecting, in company with Matilda, the laying of the foundation-stone of a fine suspension-bridge, connecting together the steep banks of a beautiful ravine in the park, "if, after all, this care and cost should avail only the offspring of those hateful people. If it should prove that 'for Banquo's issue I have fil'd my mind!' I am convinced that Lady Catherine's vague insinuations had a definite purpose. There was something maliciously exulting in her eye, when sile said—'unless Lady Norman should have a son!'"

"At all events," suggested Matilda, "the time and money you are devoting to the embellishment of the estate are not thrown away. The employment amuses your mind, and injures no one."

"Injures no one,—but may eventually benefit those whom I would willingly crush into dust!" cried Sir Richard, knitting

his brows

"The discovery can never be effected during your lifetime," observed Matilda. "And such of your friends as may have the misfortune to survive you, would find in the exposure of the transaction a thousand deeper causes for affliction than waste of substance in favour of the Normans of Grove Park."

"Of substance!" cried Sir Richard, with kindling eyes.
"Do you suppose that I care for a few thousands more or less, abstracted from my daughter's fortune?—No, no! the thought that troubles me is, that they may perhaps obtain the enjoyment of this place, with which my life and happiness are so intimately connected that I scarcely recognise my existence apart from Selwood; this place, where I saw the light, and where my father and my father's fathers were born before me;—this place, where I used to repair in my harassed, mortified boyhood, from the domestic tyranny of that pettifogging banker.

That so dear a possession should ever minister to the enjoyment of those whom through life I have abhorred, drives me to frenzy! Is the room you so delight in, to become the resort of the insolent, low-minded, Lady Catherine Norman? Are my pictures, my statues, my books, to fall to the share of Giles Norman,—a beast incapable of apprehending the smallest of their beauties? That noble library, which poor O'Donnel devoted years of his valuable life to arrange and classify, till the toil silvered his head,—my father's picture,—my mother's,—the trees planted by their hands,—the ancient furniture rendered sacred by their favour,—are all these to be descerated and ravaged by the hands of those Vandals?—Matilda, I have not patience to contemplate it. Were I convinced of their possessing proofs of Walter's illegitimacy, the last act of my life should be to apply a torch to the old mansion, that I might die in the blessed conviction that its threshold would never be profaned."

"Even then, the site must fall to their possession," faltered Lady Norman, shuddering at the idea that the irritated man before her was capable of accomplishing his terrible threat.

"Ay! they might build another Scarwell Castle on its smouldering remains," cried Norman, with the look of a maniac. "The woods, and waters, and spot of earth which I delight to call mine, must still be theirs. But as sure as the soul is immortal, Matilda, my spirit would haunt the descerated spot. The Normans should have no peace at Selwood. I would sit with them by the fireside, drink with them by the convivial board, pray with them by the altar, watch by their sleeping pillows, scare them on their bed of death; and be with them in terror and anguish for ever and ever!"

Matilda paused and gasped for breath as this frantic denunciation rang in her ears. She began to fear that Norman's senses were forsaking him. They were traversing the park together, and had just attained an open area commanding a fine view of the house, and commanded by it; so that if any of the household chanced to be looking forth, his frantic gestures

could not but attract their notice.

"Look at it!" cried he, stopping suddenly, and snatching Lady Norman's arm under his, while with his disengaged hand he pointed to the noble pile, every window of which was blazing with the reflected effulgence of the setting sun. "Look at that noble dwelling! The whole kingdom affords nothing comparable with it. Artists and antiquarians admire and appland it. I love it! Matilda, it is mine. It belonged to those to whom I belong. It shall never be theirs who belong not to me!"

Lady Norman became now more than ever convinced of an aberration of intellect on the part of her unfortunate companion. The agitation and remorse of the last four years had evidently

been too much for his reason. For if Giles Norman and his family were thus rejected as aliens, how much rather the found-

ling, in whose veins ne drop of kindred bleed was flowing?
"You do not look at it; you are not inclined to do justice to Selwood!" cried Sir Richard, when he saw her eyes downcast, to avoid the glaring glances of his own.

"In all our travels, I beheld no private residence comparable with it in dignity and beauty," replied Matilda, striving to rally her spirits. "But I would fain have you enjoy it while Heaven vouchsafes you the means of enjoyment, and trust to the Almighty to dispose of it justly, when we shall be no more."

"God judges us not as we judge each other!" muttered Norman, in an incoherent manner. "Man has invented laws to fetter and molest his fellow-man, the law of the strong, the law of the tyrant. The means by which such are evaded.

Matilda, are always lawful."

"I am no casuist," replied Lady Norman, gently. "If you feel troubled in spirit, surely the advice of Mr. Manningham

"You want then, to cant me into confession!" cried Norman, resuming his previous impetuosity. "To conciliate these Normans into according their protection to you and your daughter, you have undertaken to persuade me to give up my boy?

"I have undertaken nothing, except a sacred promise to yourself," replied Matilda. "Do not make me repent it by unreasonable violence. To Walter I have done, and shall continue to do, strict justice; and if I named as a desirable counsellor a member of your Church, it was because I know the secrecy of the confessional to be as that of the grave."

"My dear wife, you know nothing of these matters," interrupted Sir Richard, subdued by her gentleness. "If my secret once found its way to the confessional, it is not betrayal I should have to fear, but sentence of restitution. Anything but that, Matilda, anything but that! I would peril my eternal salvation, could it in aught avail, to secure the future heirship

of Selwood.'

He turned towards his wife as if for an approving gesture; but already she had escaped from his presence, and fied into the

house, overcome by terror and emotion.

The post of the following morning brought a long letter from Avesford to Sir Richard, filled with details of a mere matter of business. But their very insignificance seemed a relief from the excitement of his thoughts. A consignment of entiquities and objects of art, purchased by him in Italy and shipped from Naples, had, owing to some informality, been seized the preceding year by the custom-house; and during Sir Richard's recent stay in town, he had vainly endeavoured to obtain redress. But Avesford's good sense and knowledge of business

were more successful. Empowered by Norman to petition in his behalf, he now only waited instructions respecting the mode

of having them forwarded to Selwood Manor.

"How influential these mercantile people are becoming in this country!" cried Sir Richard, on acquainting Matilda with the contents of her brother-in-law's letter. "Avesford had only to speak and be attended to; while I danced attendance in vain upon those insolent commissioners. They knew me to be nobody,—not known upon 'Change—not known in the House. The landed gentry of England are thrust to the wall. Money and parliamentary influence, which is to be bought with money, are the law-makers of modern times!—Lady Catherine Norman's interest would have obtained the Woodchurch peerage. Avesford, as a man known in the money market, has obtained my bas-reliefs and statues. It is only the Roman Catholic baronet who lives and dies a blank."

"I would not have your enemy say so," rejoined Matilda, with a smile. But she soon saw by the gloomy brow of her

husband, that he considered it no laughing matter.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Quando più tra gli affanni altri si duole,
Par che dei cari suoi, più si rammenti;
E ben che stan lontani, il dolor suole
Con forte fantasis farli presenti.
Meditiamo gli affetti et le parole,
Onde ci renderian lievi i tormenti;
E con quei sensi in loro persona espressi,
Pensiamo a loro, e consoliam noi stessi!

CARLO MAGGI.

In replying to Avesford's letter, Sir Richard complied with the request of his brother-in-law that he would name an early day for their visit to Liverpool; and Matilda expected wonders from the tranquillizing influence of a sober and observant household; where, conscious that his actions were under examination, the disturbed man would refrain from those ebullitions of feeling in which he indulged at home. She calculated, and justly, that the presence of a person of whose esteem he was ambitious, would impose greater restraint upon his petulance than even the observation of what is called society.

But Lady Norman looked further and deeper than the palliation of her husband's immediate sufferings. Conscious of the deep-seated nature of the wound which she could not heal and must not presume to probe, perceiving that the age and position of Mr. Manningham in the family was not such as to command respect from a man so careless in the discharge of his religious duties, she turned her thoughts towards the only stranger she had ever seen exercise much influence over his character. Unknown to Sir Richard, she addressed a few lines

to the Abbé O'Donnel.

"If you have the least regard for your former pupil, dear sir," wrote she, "you will do violence to your inclinations; and once more visit Selwood. For years past, it has forfeited all favour in your sight. But I beseech you to dismiss from your recollection its Protestant mistress and her offspring; and remember only him whose youth was trained by your care, and whose health and spirits have become alarmingly infirm. No living mortal but yourself possesses the least authority over Sir Richard. Exert it now, for his sake, and the sake of his children. Be with us as soon as circumstances allow. We are setting off into Lancashire, on a visit that will not detain us beyond a fortnight. On our return, I trust to find you estab-

lished under our roof. Do not, I implore you, neglect this earnest invitation."

Comforted by the despatch of this epistle, Matilda prepared for their journey. Sir Richard seemed pleased with the idea of the expedition, and was gratified by Matilda's eager negative,

when he proposed leaving Walter and the tutor behind.

"Consider how strange it would appear to the Avesfords, and what a disappointment it would occasion in the family! cried she; and Mrs. Ravenscroft, who at that moment entered the room to bring her daily report of the Selsdons and Farleighs, warmly seconded Lady Norman's assertion that the sea air would be advantageous to the child's health.

That the old lady might not, if left to enlarge upon her arguments, weaken them with much prose, Lady Norman diverted

her attention from Liverpool by inquiries concerning London.
"After all our fears," she observed, "Sophy seems to be growing as great a rake as the rest of the world. The season scarcely begun, yet she talks of engagements without end!"

"It is very considerate of her (knowing how anxious I am on her account) to make all these efforts to amuse herself," replied Mrs. Ravenscroft. "Sophy is the most domestic creature on earth. But the Farleighs naturally desire some sort of family connexion to be kept up by their son. And they have consequently secured for his wife an introduction into the best society. Sophy is quite the rage, they say, in what is called Lady Dawlish's set.

"Has my poor Sophia already fallen into their hands?" was

Matilda's incautious ejaculation.

"Indeed she has. It is not every one who would have been so fortunate, during her first season in town. But she is partly indebted for her welcome among them to your kind recommendation. Sir Richard's charming cousin, Lady Catherine, was among the first to take her up; they meet daily, and daily talk of their mutual friends at Selwood. Lady Catherine has taken Selsdon in hand. She says the cubs of the Tory party belong to her,—that she is obliged to drill them into shape; and Sophia declares it is amazing how much influence Lady Catherine has already acquired over him."

"Lord Selsdon, too!" exclaimed Matilda, amazed that Mrs. Ravenscroft, whom, in her inexperienced days she had been accustomed to regard as so much a woman of the world, should be blind to the dangers awaiting her daughter and son-in-law.

Three days afterwards, they were at Liverpool; installed in the roomy, cheerful habitation of the Avesfords. Lady Norman was surprised to find it a relief to exchange the tranquil seclusion of such a spot as Selwood Manor, for the busy hum of a commercial city. It was not so much the novelty and tumult of the scene that diverted her mind, as the spectacle of happy multitudes engaged in active pursuits.

"Don't talk to me of low spirits!" said Avesford to his sister-in-law, after conducting her over the Asylum for the Blind. "Consider the unfortunates you have this day beheld, peaceful and patient under their heavy privation; and them tell me whether there is pardon in heaven for the murmurs of those on whom Providence has showered its choicest blessings, and who presume to be thankless."

"There may be embittering circumstances in a seemingly-

prosperous destiny," faltered Matilda.

"Such is ever the cry of your nervous hypochondriaes, who eat and drink so well that they digest ill, and fancy themselves unhappy," cried Avesford. "A fortnight's starvation, and stone-breaking on the high road, would cure the worst case among you, -from Byron to Sir Richard Norman. Your husband naturally of a depressed turn of mind? Nonsense! no man is born of a desponding turn. The evil is, one way or other, of our own creation. Sir Richard has had the imaginary misfortune to experience no real misfortune since he supped his first earthly mouthful from a golden pap-boat. Residing chiefly on his own estate, monarch, or at least vicercy, of all he surveys, his mind has contracted the rust of egotism. The snail in its shell is not more limited in its views of life than a man of liberal fortune who estranges himself from society. There is nothing for the cure of such ailments as Sir Richard's, but the rough encounter of cities and civilization. By finding himself of so much consequence to those around kim, he has become of too much consequence to himself. He wants at once rousing and depressing. Pardon me if I speak thus freely. But you have addressed me frankly on the subject, and I give you my frank opinion in return."

"And truly do I thank you for it!" replied Matilda. "But

Sir Richard's peculiar position-

"No man has a peculiar position," eried Avesford, stoutly. "Our great error lies in thinking so. We are all alike mites, labouring towards the same great end. Some of us are consequential mites, and choose to strut in armour; others are content to creep or bustle on in naturalibus. But neither in our own eyes nor those of each other have we a right to assume more than mitchood. It is in the sight of One greater than ourselves we may become of higher account, by admitting ourselves to be mites, but acting like men."
"Would that I dare entreat you to talk in this style to Sir

Richard!" sighed Matilda.

"I talk in this style to you, my dear sister, as to a person enjoying moral health," replied Avesford; "with an infirm spirit, I might deal more tenderly; but still without admitting that I detected its ailment. Yesterday, for instance, among the party of happy-hearted, strong-minded men who dined with me, not one of course suspected the peculiarities of Sir Richard.

er attempted to accommodate his modes of thinking to those of a stranger who was no more than any other guest at my board. What was the result? That the hypochondriac was drawn out of himself; that he felt it necessary to rally his powers of mind to place himself on a level with those with whom he was accidentally associating, and to whom he could give no higher proof of his importance, than evidence of faculties and principles equal in spirit and honour to their own. Admit that last night he retired to rest in better spirits than usual?"

" For a single evening, the most determined hypochondriac

will sometimes rally."

"Renew the occasion, and the improvement will be as often renewed. Sir Richard should pass a portion of every year in Because the legislature rejects his services, human town. nature does not reject them. There are learned and humane associations ever in operation, possessing claims on the time and talents of all wealthy and enlightened men, and double claims on those unembarrassed by peremptory occupation. Members of parliament, professional men, merchants, or bankers, are too often pressed into a service which belongs of right to those who enjoy leisure as well as opulence. Persuade Sir Richard Norman of this. Persuade him that the library at Selwood is not the universe; that the interests of the world elsewhere are worth forwarding, and its esteem worth attaining; and you will achieve a conquest greater far than when Matilda Maule first won the heart and hand of the owner of Selwood Manor!"

"I must leave the lesson to abler hands," replied Lady Norman with a sigh. "A wife is the last preceptor by whom a

man likes to be admonished."

"Don't say that!" interrupted Avesford, as the pony carriage stopped at his own door. "Some men delight in petticoat government. Ask Elizabeth whether I am not a docile animal in domestic life. She forbad me, for instance, this morning, to invite the Audleys to my house during your stay. Without inquiring the motive of her interdiction, I promised ebedience."

"The motive," replied Lady Norman, with a smile, "you deserve to know, in requital of your good advice. I requested my sister to defer her invitations till after our departure; having reason to believe that Norman's desire to avoid making his cousin's acquaintance, was the sele cause of his repugnance to visit you at Fern Hill."

"Your explanation consigns me to confusion worse confounded!" cried Avesford, shrugging his shoulders. "But into other people's motives I rarely trouble myself with inquiries. Suffice it if I understand my own, and those of my wife."

Sir Richard, meanwhile, soon found his reserve give way before the frank good-humour with which his brother-in-law did the honour of his native city, exhibiting its fine monuments with pride, but without exaggerating their importance.

"We do not ask experienced travellers like yourselves to think much of us," said he to the Normans. "But we know our own value. We are able to note to a figure the increase of our capital and population. For our public monuments and institutions, we are not indebted to kingly favour, or the caprice of a royal concubine. All you behold around us is the fruit of honest and unassisted industry. Can your Florences and Milans say as much for themselves?"

To little Walter, on the other hand, Avesford had the gratification of displaying the wonders of a vessel of a thousand tons, launched two years previously by himself, and now returning from a first voyage to the East. And in the houses of Avesford's friends and connections, Sir Richard was surprised to find interesting collections and valuable works of art, prized as highly by the owners as by himself the heirlooms of Selwood.

"You are as much startled, I perceive, at discovering a fine black-letter library under the roof of my uncle John." said Avesford, "as at finding crystal and porcelain, inlaid woods and silken hangings, in the cabin of a New York merchantman. You have hitherto judged us by your experience of the Wicksets and Cruttendens. But as John Maule informed you, my dear Sir Richard, we are proud people; proud of our connection with such names as Roscoe and Canning.* Even Manchester, which strangers call our sister, we look down upon as a country cousin; and as to Birmingham-but I will not affront Bessy,

who, I perceive, is pouting at me already.

Avesford's exultation in favour of his thriving birthplace was warmly echoed by the Normans. Sir Richard was vexed only that his brother-in-law's friends would allow him no respite from the beauties of Fern Hill. Avesford, familiar with those of Selwood, knew that Sir Richard might return in peace to Worcestershire, without having admired the growth of his shrubberies, or the Oriental stucco of his banqueting-room. But Fern Hill was a chartered show-place, in its humble neighbourhood; and Norman began to fear that the innumerable queries and comments with which he was assailed on the subject must end in a request to be driven some morning towards Birkenhead, in the neighbourhood of which the villa was situated. But from this he was spared by the tact of the Avesfords.

"That he would only retain his present happy spirits!" thought Matilda, as she saw him take the arm of his brotherin-law, and set off with elastic step towards the Exchange. "Here, how easy it seems to amuse him; he who detests the name of trade, and declares that, from the sale of Joseph by his brethren, all human bargains consist in knavery on one side, and dupery on the other!"

^{*} This work was written in 1836.

She did not perceive that the very incongruity of the place with his former experience constituted its charm in his eyes; and that the contrast of the bustling quays with his silent study at Selwood was as admirable to him as his own stately person and graceful manners to the solid but simple individuals with whom he was consorting.

"Prepare yourself for a grand exhibition to-day at my friend Wainewright's dinner," observed Avesford, as the Normans were preparing to proceed to the hospitable roof of the gentle-man whose aid had been instrumental in the recovery of Sir Richard's Italian treasures, and with whom, during his stay in Liverpool, he had formed a pleasant acquaintance. "Wainewright is a capital fellow. But he is unfortunately our exmayor; and mayoralties, like the measles, are often fatal in the rudiments of disease they leave behind. Wainewright has never recovered his mayoralty."

"It is, at least, not an infectious disorder," said Sir Richard. "We may enjoy your friend's turtle, without fear of the result."

"If he required us to enjoy only his turtle. But Wainewright chooses his guests to enjoy his service of plate; and what living mortal cares for the service of plate of any other man?"

"I care very much for the Cellini he showed us the other

" observed Sir Richard.

"Certainly. But Wainewright is more engrossed by his Rockingham dessert-service, or engraved champagne-glasses, which any one may have for money. We are not impeccable, even in Liverpool," continued Avesford, gaily. "There occurred a royal visit during Wainewright's mayoralty, which unluckily inoculated him with a taste for courtiership; and he has warmed at the sight of a lord, or even a baronet, from that day to this.'

The projected journey of the following morning having disorganized their arrangement, the Normans, contrary to their custom, were late; and Mr. Wainewright's drawing-rooms were filled with strangers when they arrived. The dinner, which was announced before they could take a survey of the company, verified Avesford's declaration that it would prove altogether vanity. The party nearly doubled the amount of guests which any but a crowned head can entertain with comfort; and the double dozen was accordingly condemned to a hot room and cold dinner; turtle with the chill off, and lime-punch warmed through.

Sir Richard, however, was no epicure, and was sufficiently accustomed to good men's feasts to be patient with one of moderate excellence. Seated beside the lady of the house, he had on his left a fine-looking woman, whose name he did not hear, but whose title was speedily pointed out by the ardour with which Mrs. Wainewright demanded "which soup her ladyship would take?" Her ladyship, however, seemed inclined to take nothing, except inordinate notice of Sir Richard Norman; and with that susceptibility to attention common to his sex, he soon made up his mind in return, that his fair neighbour was as intelligent as she was handsome. They entered into free discussion of England and the continent; and Norman was beginning to experience some surprise at the accurate knowledge of his position and pursuits implied by the remarks of his companion, when she suddenly observed, with a smile, "I am inclined to fear that Sir Richard Norman does not know me. Surely, you cannot have forgotten your cousin Agatha?"

The agitated start of the baronet replied better than words; and instantly glancing towards Matilda, he discerned from the air of sympathy with which she sat regarding him, that she had already discovered into whose unwelcome presence they

had been betraved.

Unaware of any family connection between the parties, Mr. Wainewright had mayorishly considered that a Roman Catholic baronet was exactly the person to be invited to meet a Roman Catholic baronet; and in so doing had gratified the eager

curiosity of Lady Audley.

Avesford had afforded singular attestation to his assertion that "Liverpool people are not infallible," by defining Lady Audley as a "high-minded" woman. The sentiment he mistook for high-mindedness, was merely hauteur. Lady Audley was proud as a peacock of her Normanship. Though married to a man of descent equally honourable, pride of birth,—pride of self,—pride of family,—predominated in her mind. Nor had she yet forgiven Sir Richard's refusal to elevate her to the head of the clan which she regarded with such partiality.

Piqued into a determination to prove to her cousin that it was in her power to form an alliance more eligible than the one he denied her, Agatha Norman had remained single, till her father's death, by doubling her portion, tempted Sir Thomas Audley to repair his family seat at her expense, affording her, in exchange, the long-coveted dignity of precedence as a

baronet's wife.

But in anything but title Lady Audley was no improvement upon Agatha Norman. Her abilities were invalidated by inordinate self-esteem. Though a handsome woman, a certain sarcastic dryness of manner, derived from her father, had prevented her, even in youth, from appearing young; and now, at four-and-thirty, she passed for a middle-aged woman. There abided no pleasant weakness in the lady of Audley Oaks. She disliked all trivialities, such as children, poetry, flowers, or needlework. Her genius soared above the trash of novels. But she was a mathematician, a metaphysician, and divers other icians; not a musician, however; for of that gentle art she cared only for

thorough bass; and to the wonder of the Wainewrights and their kind, could out-argue the mayor and corporation in political economy. In the neighbourhood of Audley Oaks, as formerly in that of Grove Park, she was cited by the elderlies as a very superior woman—the best whist-player in the county; but the moment Miss Norman, or Lady Audley, walked into a room,

the young people retired to the room adjoining.

Aware of the connection by marriage between her country neighbours the Avesfords and the Selwood family, Lady Audley was surprised that she had not been invited to meet them during their sojourn. Accustomed from her youth to mercantile society, she was always glad to escape from the tediousness of the dullest house and dullest husband in the kingdom to cheerful dinner society, where she had the satisfaction of wrangling with the men in authority, and taking precedence of their wives; and she felt annoyed at having been unable to exhibit her superiority to the homely sister of the unpretending Elizabeth Avesford.

The beauty and refinement of Lady Norman proved, consequently, a severe blow. Matilda's graces, if polished by the ease of continental society, were undeteriorated by the affectations of fashion. Lady Audley could only console herself by deciding that the soft, mild, submissive brow of Matilda was far below the level of the true Norman spirit, as exhibited in all its harsh and arrogant altitude on the handsome brow of Sir

Richard.

For to her his very defects were attractive. The proud, shy boy, in whom her girlhood had delighted, was now the haughty, reserved man, the type of all she had dreamed in her projects of wedded happiness. Such was the husband with whom she would fain have studied divinity, emblazoned genealogies, and cavilled evening after evening in metaphysical disquisition; living and dying within compass of their park wall; and performing their daily orisons apart from the vulgar throng, in the very chapel where their Normanized dust was to be secured from amalgamation with plebeian clay. She felt, and perhaps justly, that her iron nature was more congenial with his than the golden ductility of Matilda. And when from the contemplation of Sir Richard's distinguished air and features, stern as an effigy of the middle ages, she turned towards the unmeaning face and diminutive person of Sir Thomas Audley, who sat hemming and hawing his common-place platitudes into the ear of the patient Lady Norman, it was impossible to repress the consciousness that her scornful cousin had the best of it.

On another point, again, she was forced to confess inferiority. Long had it gratified to know that her brother remained sole heir to the dignities of Selwood Manor and Norman Castle; the birth of Walter was as severe a mortification to her as to Lady Catherine. With her sister-in-law indeed, who at that time

resided with the family at Grove Park, she was as much at variance as might be anticipated from the collision of tempers so arbitrary; yet it was not the less a grievance to find her family excluded from their long-expected inheritance, by the

child of a manufacturer's daughter.

Such was the feeling which had produced those anxious inquiries of the Avesfords concerning little Walter, attributed by Sir Richard to suspicions which had never entered the mind of his cousin: the assertions of Lady Catherine, respecting the supposititious birth of the heir of Selwood, having been treated by Lady Audley as the delusions of a disappointed woman. Clouds darkened, therefore, the mind of Lady Audley when,

after dinner, she requested from Mrs. Avesford an introduction to her sister. But she had not conversed half an hour with Matilda before they disappeared. The mildness of Lady Norman's manners, which most people found so ingratiating, exoited in Agatha a sentiment of pity. When Matilda talked with varying colour and sparkling eyes of her baby, and listened with unconcealed delight to a ballad having nothing but pathos and simplicity to recommend it, to which the youthful voice of one of Mrs. Wainewright's daughters was lending peculiar charm, Lady Audley admitted that such a woman was unworthy to be the object of a good, stern, solid hatred.

She accordingly oppressed Matilda with patronage, and Sir Richard had the satisfaction of finding his wife under crossexamination by the shrewd sister of Giles Norman, touching Walter's age, disposition, and resemblance to the Norman family; her voice faltering, and her colour rising to crimson, as

she replied to the interrogatory.

Little did poor Mrs. Wainewright imagine, as she ambled round her showy drawing-room with a pack of cards in her hand, recruiting for Lady Audley's rubber, what anguish of spirit was enthralling two of her guests; thanks to her notion, that a baronet could not eat his dinner unless matched with a baronet—as if guests, like salteellars, were to be assorted according to pattern.

CHAPTER XXV.

He dies, and makes no sign !- Oh! God forgive him. SHARSPEARE.

But for this unlucky encounter, great would have been the regret of the Normans on entering their travelling-carriage the following day. The frank cordiality of Elizabeth had confirmed into affection the instinctive love of her sister, while the sterling sense and manliness of Avesford had conquered the more fastidious esteem of her husband. Sir Richard felt roused and improved by his visit to these excellent people. The society in . which he was compelled to work to maintain his place, produced a far different effect upon his mind from the listless superficial nothingness of fashion; where to trifle well is the utmost aim of conversation, and where it is as much a proof of good breeding to discard all intellect from your discourse, as gold lace and embroidery from your coat.

At the moment of departure, little Walter exacted from his uncle and aunt a promise to visit Selwood in the course of the summer; while Matilda, embracing her sister with tears in her

eyes, besought a confirmation of the engagement.

"Now you have discovered that there is nothing very tremendous about my neighbours the Audleys," whispered Mrs. Avesford, in reply, "I trust it will not be long before you extend your visit to Fern Hill and bring your little girl. The children would be better for sea-bathing, of which we are within reach at Birkenhead."

"Would that we resided nearer together!" murmured Lady Norman, the depression of whose spirits was renewed at the

prospect of returning to Selwood.

"A day's journey is surely no alarming distance," observed "If you were ill, or anything went wrong at Sel-Elizabeth.

Matilda sighed heavily in reply; an apprehension of "things going wrong" hung perpetually upon her spirits.

"Farewell," said she, clasping Mrs. Avesford's hand, and springing into the carriage; while Avesford, after exchanging his last few words with his brother-in-law, bade them cheerfully adieu, and stood predicting fine weather and a pleasant journey. The travellers were to diversify their road by sleeping at Chester, and visiting several points of scenery in North Wales; and Elizabeth and her husband, as they saw them depart, could scarcely refrain from a sigh that Avesford's

avocations prevented them from accompanying their friends so

far on their journey.

"There go two human beings, one of whom is less spoiled by the world, and the other more, than any it has been my lot to encounter," said Avesford to his wife as the carriage rolled off. —" Lady Norman, in spite of fate and flattery, remains all that is best and fairest in women. That sister of yours, Bessy, has the mildness and serenity of a saint!"

"Faculties which, I fear, have been severely tried," observed Elizabeth. "There breaks out occasionally a vein of sadness in Matilda, wholly at variance with her position and character."

"I do not altogether understand either her or her husband," was Avesford's thoughtful reply. "My plumb-line is usually deep enough for most human characters; but there is a point in theirs I am unable to fathom. Norman has a way of starting at straws, which implies a more deep-seated grief or remorse than is compatible with the sunshiny existence he has enjoyed."

"The result of morbid sensibility," suggested Elizabeth.

"A sensitive spot denotes a previous wound, a foregone conclusion," replied her husband; "and, immured as he has been at Selwood Manor, how can he have endured any deep affliction? Like other spoiled children of fortune, Norman is sick of too many sweets. He wants some right earnest misfortune to bring him to his senses."

"For Matilda's sake, God avert it!" cried Elizabeth, fer-

vently.

"For his and her own, I would fain see his fine talents developed, and his petulance corrected, before it be too late," replied her husband. "Though far from the overbearing brute he was described by your brother Crutt and old Tom, Sir Richard becomes occasionally an imperious, disagreeable companion; and I prize his generous, honourable nature too highly not to wish him to become of real value in the world. That man was meant for something better than a clod; but he has been pampered into most unchristian selfishness. It is only by suffering persecution now and then, that these great ones learn mercy!"

This severe sentence recurred painfully to the recollection of Elizabeth when, in the dead of the following night, they were called from their beds to peruse a letter from Matilda, forwarded by express, and written in indescribable anguish. The lightly-spoken denunciation of Avesford was already fulfilled. Sir Richard Norman was lying at an obscure inn at Chirk. Precipitated from the box of his carriage by a frightful overturn, produced by runaway horses, it was announced by the medical practitioners of the place, that nothing but the amputation of his orushed and fractured thigh was likely to preserve his life. Lady Norman entreated her brother-in-law to bring with him

to the spot, without delay, the most eminent surgeons of Liverpool.

"Lose not a moment in rejoining us," said the scarcely intelligible handwriting of Matilda; "and if my sister loves me, she

will bear you company."

Elizabeth did love her; and grieved in soul at the recollection of the harsh comments in which she had indulged the preceding day at the expense of the sufferer, could scarcely find words to reply to her husband as they took their hasty way towards those from whom they had so recently parted in all the exultation of prosperity. From the accounts extracted by Avesford from Matilda's messenger, it appeared that, in descending the hill from Chirk towards Llangollen, the horses, alarmed by a sudden outbreak of flame from a neighbouring limekiln, had started off at speed; and that Sir Richard, who sat with his son upon the barouche box, was thrown by the concussion under the carriage, while the shock lodged the lighter frame of the child, without injury, upon a grassy bank above the road. Mr. ——, the surgeon by whom they were accompanied, on learning the nature of the contusions and fractures sustained by his patient, shook his head; sickening the very heart of Elizabeth by his dissertation on amputations and mortifications, and all the evils awaiting the unhappy patient.

By noon on the following day, the surgeon was able to form his own conclusions. On a miserable bed "of the worst inn's worst room" lay extended the mangled frame of the haughty proprietor of Selwood Manor; while a single glance betrayed to Avesford Mr. — 's opinion that his journey might have been spared, his aid being wholly unavailing to the dying man. But the cestasy with which their arrival was hailed by Lady Norman (whose eyes had been for fifteen hours fixed upon the tortures of her husband), implied a far different impression.

"Blessings upon you for coming!" cried she, seizing Avesford's hand. "If you could but conceive what the suspense has been both to him and me! If you could but imagine what tor-

ments he has endured, and with what fortitude!"

"I can imagine," replied Avesford, withdrawing his tearful eyes from a face already scarcely recognisable, and moistened with the dews of death; and he whispered his request to Elizabeth to withdraw her sister from the room, who, believing that the operation, which she supposed was about to take place, constituted her husband's only chance of preservation, imprinted a kiss upon the cheek of the sufferer, and departed without a word.

"Are they gone?" demanded Sir Richard, in a hoarse voice.
"Then secure the door, my dear Avesford; and assist this gentleman to expose to Mr. ——the injury I have received."

Avesford's stout heart quaited on witnessing the excruciating sufferings inflicted upon his brother-in-law, by the mere exa-

mination. But not a murmur escaped the livid lips of Sir Richard. The deep silence that ensued, was broken by the faint

voice of Sir Richard addressing Mr.

"You agree with me, sir (I read it in your looks)," said be, "that your art can do nothing more than alleviate my sufferings? Fear not to acquaint me with the worst! I am convinced that the shock my constitution has received must be fatal; but should you entertain an opinion that amputation may preserve my life, for the sake of those who are dear to me, I submit. If not, I trust to your mercy to spare me those unavailing pangs which would render my departure painful to others as to myself."

There was a firmness in his mode of speaking which wrung the hearts of the hearers. Even the surgeon's voice was agitated, as he evasively replied, "For the present, sir, I recom-

mend only opiates and repose."
"I understand you!" replied Sir Richard. "How long do you accord me to speak a few parting words to my friends?"

"Whatever Sir Richard Norman may have to say, cannot be too quickly expressed." whispered Mr. ---. addressing Avesford, as if to avoid pronouncing sentence of death upon the dying man. "You have restoratives at hand. We will retire to the adjoining room, to be at hand in case of need. I recommend you to spare Lady Norman any further return to the chamber."

By the haste of the medical attendants in quitting him, Sir

Richard saw that his moments were numbered.

"I thank you heartily for being here, Avesford," said he, when at length alone with his brother-in-law. "Of all others, you are the man I would fain have had by me at such a moment. That this is no parade of regard, you will find attested by the fact that my last deed, in quitting Selwood for ever, was to add your name to my will as co-executor with Matilda. Scorn not the assertions of a dying man, Avesford, when I protest that I foresaw this event. I felt that my end was drawing near; and bless God for even this agonizing death-bed, since it relieves me from an apprehension I have long enter-tained, that I should die by my own hand."

For a moment he was silent, overpowered by the profound emotion given from a thousand painful reminiscences. Aves-

ford, believing him to be exhausted by his efforts, hastily ten-

dered the remedies placed within his reach by Mr. -

"I respect you as a man of principle and honour," resumed Norman, pressing the hand of his brother-in-law. "We have not been long acquainted; but from the first hour I passed in your company, Avesford, I felt that I could wish you to be a father to my children,—a brother to my wife. called upon somewhat hastily to accept these duties. My

time is short. Will you console my last moments by your acquiescence?"

"I will,—I do!" exclaimed Avesford; his tears falling unrestrainedly upon the hand extended towards him. "I promise you, on the faith of an honest man, to execute to the best of my

abilities the trust you repose in me!"

"Thanks, thanks!" faltered the sufferer, the contraction of his brow relaxing for a moment, as if relieved from a load of care. "In a worldly point of view, I do not meet this crisis unprepared. You will find ample instructions among my papers at the Manor. Enclosed in my will, also, is a letter addressed to my son, which I commit to your hands to retain inviolate, till Walter shall attain his majority. On that day, let him open it in your presence.

But should he die under age, commit the packet to the flames.

The words of a death-bed, dear Avesford, are sacred words! My last demand of you is an oath that, till the appointed period, even your wife and mine shall remain ignorant of the existence of that letter?"

Avesford pressed his brother-in-law's hand in token of

assent.

"Speak!" exclaimed Sir Richard Norman. "I cannot die in peace till the voice of comfort has sounded in my ears."

"I solemnly engage myself to fulfil your wishes. No living soul shall be acquainted with the existence of the letter," replied

Avesford, in a low concentrated voice.

" Enough!" said the dying man, over whose countenance convulsions of agony were now rapidly passing; and feebly drawing towards him the hand of Avesford, which enclasped his own, he held it a moment to his lips. "Be this the seal of an eternal covenant between us!" he faintly murmured; and as he sank back on his pillow, Avesford feared that his spirit was already passing away. A groan of anguish at length proclaimed that sensibility was still vouchsafed him.

" I die in the faith of my fathers, and with my fathers would I be laid in the grave!" said Sir Richard, in a hoarse voice, after a painful pause. "Should the rigour of the law visit the unfortunate fellows whose rashness occasioned the accident which deprives me of life, step forward in their behalf; and if punishment be awarded, see their families provided for on my account. Let not the number be augmented of those who may have cause to curse my memory. I have sins to answer, far more heavy than their ruin. Avesford, dear Avesford! This is a trying hour,—a bitter hour,—an hour which no measure of preparation may abide; far less a soul so lost and erring as mine.—Give me drink,—give me oplum,—give me peace!— I have not strength to face all that is gathering round me

Instead of complying, Avesford hastily summoned Mr. S---: by whose aid temporary relief was afforded to the patient. For some minutes he lay silent upon the pillow, as if enjoying a momentary respite.

"Where is Matilda? call Matilda!" were the first intelligible

words he uttered, on unclosing his eyes.

"Let me entreat you, sir, to spare the tender feelings of Lady

Norman," interposed Mr. -

"You do not know my wife, sir, and you do not know me," said the dying man, almost sternly. "Call Matilda, my dear Avesford, and let my son be brought to my bedside.'

And in spite of the remonstrances of the surgeons, Avesford chose that the request of his brother-in-law should be complied with. His expectations were not disappointed. Lady Norman advanced into the room without an exclamation, without a word. Scarcely sensible to what was passing around her, she resembled a corpse obeying the commands of a voice from the dead, as she leaned her head against the bedstead, and gazed

intently on the dying face of her husband.

"I have summoned you hither, my most beloved wife," said Sir Richard Norman, "to receive, in presence of witnesses, my thanks for your unremitting love and duty. You have been to me a wife such as never husband yet was blessed with;
—such as, alas! your husband little deserved. You have supported harshness, caprice, injury. You have been an angel, Matilda—a spotless, holy angel. And long may you live to display these precious virtues, as a joy and an example to our children!"

At these words, Matilda looked round distractedly. She looked round to see whether there were none present to whom she could appeal with an entreaty that the dying man might be exhorted to confession. At such a moment, the words "our children" sounded like his flat of eternal condemnation. But no human look responded to hers. The professional men stood calm and curious, noting the symptoms of the dying man. Avesford and Elizabeth sought only to lighten his mortal suffer-

ings. Not one of them was with her in the spirit.

"Blessed woman, I bid thee farewell!" faltered Norman, with impeded utterance. "I dare not ask thee to forgive, I would not ask thee to forget." Then, fixing a look of intense love upon the face of his wife, "Come nearer," said he, raising his voice, when, at that moment, in obedience to his summons, Ghita and her young charge entered the room. "Lift my boy towards me! Be not afraid, Walter, of your poor, dying, dis-figured father. Kiss me, Walter—kiss me for the last time! I am about to leave you. You will henceforward be obedient to Mr. Avesford, and a tender dutiful child to your mother; in all things comporting yourself as becomes the name of Norman, and the heir of Selwood. Matilda!" he continued, raising his hand towards his wife, and drawing her towards the boy, "by the recorded vows of your lips, I charge you that, as you have

been the truest of wives, you prove as good and tender a mother to my son!"

Lady Norman, half-resisting, half-frantic, gazed wildly around her; exclaiming,—"And no blessing to my child!—He

dies, and bequeaths no blessing to Constance.

"Ghita!" resumed Sir Richard, addressing the Italian woman, who stood composed and stern by the bedside, "bear witness of my last moments! You are the only person present professing my faith. Be it yours to attest to those who regard me, that it was through no waywardness or negligence I dispensed with the last sacraments of my church!"

Lady Norman, who had despatched a messenger to Selwood at the same moment as to the Avesfords, requiring Mr. Manningham to hasten to the spot, bringing her little girl to receive the benediction of her parent, started as, at that moment, the galloping of horses became audible. A carriage

was heard to stop.

"It is your daughter!" oried she. "Exclude her not, dear Norman, from your last affections. Bless also this little one for my sake. If you ever loved me, if you would have me faithful to your last instructions, bless—oh! bless my ehild!"

"I will,-I do!" said he, in faint accents, bending upon the earnest face of his wife a look softened by tenderness and compunction. "May her innocence plead with Heaven for

mercy upon her unhappy father!"

As the door of the chamber slowly unclosed, the eyes of the expiring man turned wistfully towards it, expecting to rest upon his child; while those surrounding the death-bed stood

aside, to give the infant access to its father.

But at that moment, a groan of horror burst from the lips of Norman, and a frightful pang distorted his countenance. It was the Abbé O'Donnel, who advanced slowly into the room. Having obeyed the summons of Matilda, he was awaiting at the Manor their return from Liverpool, when the messenger of sad tidings arrived, requiring spiritual aid for Sir Richard Norman.

Imposing and calm, the old man stood beside the bed of the

dying sinner.
"Disturb him not!" cried Avesford, perceiving the agony produced by the stranger's sudden appearance in the frame of

the dying man.—" He is insensible.—It is too late!"

"In the name of the Most High God, I charge you,"-said the trembling voice of the priest, -while Matilda, with clasped hands, gazed in dreadful uncertainty upon the altered countenance of her husband.

But the announcement of Avesford obtained fatal confirmation. The surgeon, who was standing beside the pillow, bent

down and gently closed the eyes of the dead.

The long-suppressed grief of the mourners burst forth. But the priest, falling on his knees beside the bed, prayed for mercy upon the sinful soul, which he had trusted to rebuke into atonement, or soften into repentance.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Rouler dans ce tourbillon, c'est gâter son âme. Le Musceur.

YEARS and years passed away. The December of 1835, at which we have arrived, though in London misty and dismal, was a fine open season in the country. His Majesty and his Majesty's ministers, with due regard to the solicitudes of a nation divided into lords, commons, and fox-hunters, had suspended, with sufficient prorogation, the unprofitable synod that proses in behalf of the country. Parliament was up; its worshipful members were at their country seats. The poorwere on the look-out for an annual dole of coals and blankets;—the servants' halls athirst for strong beer. The pews of parish churches were enlivened with holly-branches, and every mansion of mark and likelihood with Christmas guests.

For that season, which on the continent rings its merry changes in towns and cities, inviting the higher class of the population to congregate in joyous multitudes amid the gorgeous galas of the court, the crowded theatre, the giddy pageant, —gives in England the signal for dispersion; and leafless groves and sodden pastures, flowerless gardens and miry ways, prove more attractive than the leafy brightness of summer. No matter!—The poor are gainers by the infatuation; and it must be admitted that the highest evidence of the opulence and refinement of Great Britain is to be found in a first-rate

country-house prepared for holiday hospitalities.

Tuxwell Park was overflowing with company. Not the Tuxwell Park of Lord Selsdon's bridal days, with its old-fashioned corps de logie, and modest dependencies. But the fine mansion produced by two extensive wings added to the old house by the present Lord Farleigh on the death of his father, with a set of princely hunting-stables, the admiration of the country round. For Tuxwell might now be considered the family seat. Farleigh Castle was comparatively deserted; being inhabited only during the sultry months of August and September. Its noble site and commodious distribution pleaded nothing in its favour. The roads were fatal to visiting,—the neighbourhood to sporting. Whereas Tuxwell possessed the

superlative Great British merit of being situated in a hunting

country.

Thither, accordingly, Lord Farleigh had transferred his seat of government, at the cost of some fifty thousand pounds, to render it a habitation suitable to his present fortunes; to say nothing of a vast expenditure of indignation on the part of his sister, who witnessed with grief the descoration of the home of her childhood.

The rest of his lordship's family, however, warmly seconded his preference. Lady Farleigh loved the place for reminis-cences of "lang syne." There had her youth been idled away; there had her children been born to her. Her harmless existence associated itself with Tuxwell; and though strangers were of opinion that Lord Farleigh would never make more of the place than Louis XIV. was said to have made of Versailles -- "a worthless favourite"-the countess was grateful for the favours showered upon the object of her partiality. Her daughters, Lady Louisa and Lady Sophia, now presented at court and moving in the world, preferred the ebserful populous neighbourhood of Tuxwell; while young Lord Selsdon, who was just quitting Eton for Oxford, a dashing amateur in the leading pursuit of his order, regarded the kennel and stables of Tuxwell as cheft-d'auvre surpassing those of the picture-gallery of Farleigh Castle. A worthy son of his father, young Selsdon already devoted the energies of his mind and body to fox-hunting. The pursuit which our halfsducated sires were compelled to adopt as a relief for their vacant hours, having been heightened to the relish of the present day by a touch of profligacy in the luxurious expenses it entails, it is esteemed worthy to engross the attention of those who disdain all pleasures untinged by folly and extravagance.

It was gratifying indeed to Lord Farleigh to behold in his son a youth of such promise and spirit; having gone through Eton "very fairly,"—that is, with all the indulgence due to his future earldom; and being already one of the boldest riders in the county and a first-rate judge of a horse. The earl, meanwhile, had subsided into a heavy red-faced, hard-riding, hardliving man of forty-five; kind-hearted and domestic, a bigoted Tory in his politics, but a liberal landlerd to such of his tenants as chose to bow the knee to the golden image he had set up; voting and praying according to his lordship's conscience, supporting his lordship's members, preserving his lordship's foxes, and adhering to the worship of the church by law established. He was, in short, as the Conservative Chronicle of the county frequently informed its readers, "one of the finest specimens extant of the British nobleman of the good old times!"

The good-humoured unenlightened boy, Lord Selsdon, was, in fact, the father of the narrow-minded, kindly-affectioned man. Lord Farleigh: and, though the gradation may not appear

at first so natural, the superficial, lively Sophia, was now the elegant and worldly Countess. Forced by the misjudging zeal of the Farleigh family into the vortex of fashionable society, it was perhaps fortunate that the influence of such persons as the Dawlishes, Normans, and Arthur D.'s, had rendered her nothing worse than frivolous. Dress and fashion, music and fine people, had luckily become her only idols. And though the cultivation of these polite predilections withdrew her attention from her children, and consigned to a head nurse and patent governess the authority which never should have escaped her hands, they had not prevented her from remaining an attached wife, content to spend the five hunting and three shooting months of the year in the country, provided she were allowed to fill the house with company, and pass the four remaining amidst the supreme bon ton of London. Nothing in her conduct was in the slightest degree derogatory to her order. The Farleighs gloried in seeing their daughter-in-law assume a definite position in the world; while poor old Mrs. Ravenscroft, towards whom she remained an affectionate, grateful daughter, considered that Sophy was fulfilling a moral duty in adopting the practices of her caste.

As her daughters advanced towards womanhood, however, the motherly heart of the indolent, unobservant Lady Farleigh began to lack something in their nature. Though their desertion of Farleigh Castle occasioned some interruption to her intimacy with Selwood Manor, her annual intercourse with the friend of her youth remained warm and unconstrained; and she could not but notice the different state of feeling existing between Lady Norman and her lovely Constance, from that prevailing at Tuxwell Park. Yet, if she did not absolutely blame her girls, she was far from attributing to herself her due

share in the errors of the system.

The widowed Lady Norman had devoted seventeen years of her life to the gentle creature youchsafed as its consolation, and in the grateful love of her child she had her reward. Constance Norman was a vital portion of her mother's existence; had known no other nurse, no other preceptress. Matilda had found courage to recommence her defective education, to qualify herself for presiding over that of her daughter. But unluckily, while imbibing and imparting the lessons destined to store the mind and strengthen the understanding of her daughter, she had neglected to fortify the heart. Blind, like every other human being, to the seat of her own weakness, she saw not that the errors of her life were attributable to overweening affection: and not only persisted in her fault by transferring to her girl the worship she had formerly bestowed on her husband, but nurtured the gentle susceptibility of Constance, to feel that all human happiness is concentrated in reciprocity of human affection. It was a lovely fault—a gentle fault—a woman's fault. But still a fault!

Lady Farleigh, accustomed to confer with Lady Louisa and Lady Sophia as pleasant acquaintances, could not but perceive that it was an intimate friendship that united together the mother and daughter at Selwood. Unused to judge harshly of herself or others, she attributed the difference to the fact that her girls found friends and confidantes in each other, while Constance had no companion but Lady Norman; for she had never happened to see her with her brother. She had never witnessed the passionate fondness of Sir Walter for his sister, or the earnest love with which it was requited. The young heir of Selwood had now been more than a twelvemonth on the continent, during which time Matilda and her daughter remained isolated at the Manor.

The ladies Sophia and Louisa meanwhile entertained for Miss Norman the most friendly regard. Annual visits had constantly maintained the intimacy of the parents. Matilda cultivated for her daughter the acquaintance of Lady Farleigh's girls as an incentive to emulation in her studies; while the professed governess at Tuxwell regarded Miss Norman as a poor inoffensive girl, whose education was shamefully neglected, but whose manners were so shy, and whose prospects in life so brilliant, that no injury was to be apprehended for her pupils

from the association.

Very different were Lord Farleigh's views respecting Sir Walter. With due respect for the memory of his late neighbour, he could not forgive his having delegated the guardianship of his son to a Liverpool merchant, an avowed Radical, and a supposed enemy to church and state. Not contented with having connected himself with a tribe of Birmingham brassfounders, Sir Richard had perpetuated the evil by bequeathing his son to the hands of the Philistines. Instead of selecting himself, his nearest country neighbour, and Giles Norman Lord Mornington, his nearest kinsman (both right-thinking Tories and friends to their country), to teach the young ideas of the youthful baronet how to shoot, he had left him under the petticoat government of his mother, and the still more fatal influence of a man who, in spite of his wealth, personal respectability, and distinction in parliament, was, after all, but a perverter of the public morals, and a disturber of the public peace. What chance of a manly sportsman or a gentlemanly Conservative from such a school?

Lord Farleigh rejoiced, therefore, that five years' difference of age would be a bar to all familiarity between his son Lord

Selsdon, and Sir Walter Norman of Selwood.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Time hath, my lord, a wallet on his back, In which he puts alms for Oblivion.

THE imperceptible links enchaining the trivial events of daily life unite them in such harmonious gradation, that few things appear discrepant or surprising. But jump over lifteen or twenty years, and the syncopic transition demonstrates, with marvellous effect, the mighty progress operating, unseen,

unheard, unfelt, around us and our contemporaries.

From the death of George III., for instance, to that of William IV., what changes in public opinion,—in the legislation of the country,—in the position of Europe,—in the balance of power! Most of us have lived through these eventful sixteen years, heedless of the mighty reforms they were silently effecting. Yet could Sir Richard Norman have risen from the grave at his son's attainment of his majority, he would have scarcely credited with what uneventful ease the Catholics had been emancipated, and Parliament refermed. It must have startled him to learn that, by a sudden turn of the wheel, Toryism was grovelling in the mire; that a promise had been already exterted from his son to represent, when of age, the neighbouring borough of T---; that Avesford was a popular member, and Cruttenden Maule the Anacharsis Cloots of fifty thousand sturdy malcontents; Lord and Lady Mornington were trembling for the suppression of their patent place and pension; Madame de Montrond was darning stockings at Prague; and Admiral Guerchant was prime minister. The royal cottage had disappeared from Windsor Park; the Queen's house was now the Queen's palace; and the palace of Versailles a national museum!

Yet all this had been accomplished without a volcanic explosion. The rough places were made plain, and the crooked straight, by the mere irresistible force of events; the silent

progress of time, which brings all things to their level.

In the external appearance of things at Selwood Manor, little change was discernible. Avesford and Lady Norman, to whose hands as wide a discretionary power had been bequeathed by Sir Richard as was compatible with the strict nature of the entail, were too judicious to fancy that the place needed improvement; and saving that a few old tenants were replaced by their sons, and a few old woods ripe for the axe, all was as of yore.

According to the tenour of Sir Richard's testamentary instructions, Walter had been educated at home, under the care of Mr. Manningham, till it was time to remove him to Stonyhurst, where he remained till his seventeenth year. The two years following were spent at Rome, under the care of his tutor; and the remaining period, till the accomplishment of his majority, in a tour of Europe.

"I wish my son to be educated in the faith of his forefathers," wrote Sir Richard; "but should his views on attaining to man's estate incline towards Protestantism, or should he feel disposed to ally himself with a Protestant, Walter will offer no offence to

my memory by following the bent of his inclinations.

This clause in the testamentary dispositions of his former pupil had out the Abbé O'Donnel to the soul. Overpowered by the dreadful catastrophe which had precipitated Sir Richard Norman into the grave, the old man had scarcely found courage to officiate in the religious duties naturally falling to his share. Surmounting his anguish, however, he assisted Manningham in the solemnization of the obsequies of his pupil; but having risen from a bed of sickness to attend the summons of Lady Norman, the effort proved too much for him. Unable to enter at once into those remonstrances with Matilda which the interests of the heir of Selwood seemed to demand, the Abbé deferred, till both should have resumed some degree of composure, the explanation he considered indispensable; and set off to Lancashire to discharge, during this afflicting and probably final visit to England, the last services he might be able to render to a Church which, among her faithful sons, boasted none who had ministered more zealously to her welfare.

He was to visit Selwood on his return; and Lady Norman trembled at the prospect of the interview. But the hand of a mightier disposer was over them both. The fatigue of the journey, and the shock by which it was succeeded, proved too much for the broken constitution of a man worn out by fasts and mortifications. The words of Wolsey's salutation to the Abbot of Leicester announced to O'Donnel's host of the north a similar consummation; and instead of welcoming him back to the house of mourning, the widow received an announcement that, within two months of the death of his pupil, the old man slept in death! His decease was sudden, while officiating at the altar in his sacred functions; without a word of farewell for those he loved, or an admonitory word for the widow of Sir

Richard Norman.

The Avesfords were almost angry at the regret expressed by Matilda on learning the death of the Abbé. Though far from sharing the prejudices of Tom Cruttenden, or his god-son, against the vocation of the venerable priest, they could not conceive his loss to be in any way important to Lady Norman; and considered it a happy thing for Walter that one bigot the

less would interfere in his early studies. They could not sympathize with Matilda's feelings, that in the Abbé she had lost her husband's intimate associate; the only person to whom his

wishes and opinions were known.

Stunned by the blow of her bereavement, Lady Norman remained for some time indifferent to worldly affairs; and when the importunities of business recalled her to the recollection of the precipice on which she stood, she was tranquillized by a letter from Lady Catherine Norman, written in pretended ignorance of any ill-will between the late baronet and her husband, and offering the warmest assurances of friendship on the part of Giles Norman towards his young cousins, Sir Walter and his sister. They had given up all idea of disputing the legitimacy of the heir of Selwood. Having pushed their examination into the nature of his claims, so as to ascertain that Sir Richard's measures were too carefully taken to leave them an inch of vantage ground, they found it their best policy to fortify their position in the world as heirs-presumptive to the title and property, by becoming his warm allies. The life of adahing, daring boy, did not present half the obstacles to their hopes that existed during the life of Sir Richard Norman.

As Sir Walter grew towards maturity, however, these expectations decreased. It was impossible to behold a finer or more promising young man than young Norman, when quitting Stonyhurst on his way to the continent. Their own pampered, sickly son, though four years his senior, and a captain in the guards, was far inferior in appearance; and though Giles's elevation to the peerage, as Lord Mornington of Grove Park, diminished his regret for the probable loss of the baronetoy, the impermanency of Government benefactions, in these reforming times, served to enhance his estimation of the Selwood rent-roll. Even "captains," they knew, "were casual things;" and it was an afflicting consideration that their puny son, the inheritor of three thousand per annum, was likely to be reduced to pau-

perism by the curtailments of office.

It had been Avesford's principle, witless as he was of anything more than met the eye in the position of his ward, to allow him free communication with every member of his father's family. Matilda, alive to the true circumstances of the case, and personally mistrustful of Lord and Lady Mornington, suggested, in their instance, more reserve. But Avesford would

not hear of it.

"Let the lad be brought up with his eyes open," said he. "Since his father consented that he should make his election in matters of religion, it is our duty to take care that he enjoys every opportunity of deciding for himself, in such minor points as family feuds. Let the boy be brought up with his eyes open."

On the other hand, Avesford and his wife were amazed at

the unaccountable preference accorded by Matilda to her daughter. Every human feeling may be feigned save mother's love. But in that, nature cries aloud; and with all Lady Norman's desire that no difference should be perceptible in her treatment of Walter and Constance, scarcely a visitor quitted Selwood Manor during the childhood of the two, without noticing how

much the little girl was the favourite.

The children themselves were happily blind to the circumstance. Lady Norman was still to Walter all she had been from his birth; and the boy could conjecture no softer affection, no care more vigilant, than that of his beloved mother. By his father and nurse, indeed, this filial feeling had in infancy been festered; by the former, from anxiety to knit more closely the ties uniting Matilda and the boy; by the latter, from knowing that the claims and privileges of her nursling were dependent on the will of Lady Norman. Between the leasons of both, and his intuitive sense of the feminine loveliness of her character, his devotion to his mother became a passion rather than a sentiment. The slightest reproof from her lips would bring tears into his eyes, when the chastisements of others rendered him only more stubborn. No need to enforce her authority. It needed only to say, "Lady Norman wishes it," to reduce him to submission. In Constance, he adored his mother's image, refined and softened; and his tenderness for his sister resembled rather the devotion of a lover than the rough familiar kindness prevalent in a family of young people of the same age.

Sir Walter grew up eminently handsome. With the prejudice that delights in tracing family resemblances, every one in Worcestershire decided that he was the image of his father. But Lady Norman saw with more discerning eyes. There was an accidental resemblance between them, in their darkness of hair and complexion. But while thankful for the chance which so far favoured their deception, she could not help wondering that eyes were to be found so unobservant as to trace affinity between the dark grey eyes and stern brow of Sir Richard, and the joyous expression of Walter's hazel eyes and animated countenance. Not but that the looks of the latter could be moved from their youthful brightness. But they never clouded into sullenness. The feeling of the moment often fired that impetuous temper. His passions were readily moved. But he had a fine generous character to redeem every lesser fault, and account for the strong affection with which Avesford was begin-

ning to regard his ward.

It was Matilda's fate to behold her whole family attach itself to Walter to the prejudice of her little girl. The frailty of human nature renders even human tenderness subject to worldly motives. The Maules were fond of Constance; but they were proud of Sir Walter Norman of Selwood Manor. Old Maule, as he grew in years, actually doated upon his

grandson; preferring him at once to Constance Norman,—to little Charles, the sickly, only child of the Avesfords,—and to the half-dozen mum, prim, demure, unmeaning Maules of Woldham Rectory. Even the Cruttendens, young and old, though affecting some indignation that he should have been consigned exclusively to the guardianship of Avesford, a comparative stranger in the family, delighted in the lad; and were never happier that when passing a few days at Selwood every autumn; young Crutt devoting himself to the preserves, and old Crutt to bringing down higher game, by smoking the Catholic tutor, and joking poor Matty into tears by recommending a second marriage.

The regard of Avesford was necessarily of a higher order. He delighted in the manliness of Walter's character, and the vigour of his understanding. Under the hands of Manningham, he had become a fine scholar. But he was not a mere scholar; and though secured by the peculiarities of his education from the schoolboy's inevitable waste of time, the absence of all maternal solicitude on the part of Matilda, preserved him from effeminacy, the ordinary defect of home-bred boys. On quitting England for Rome, at seventeen years of age, Sir Walter was a spirited, impetuous youth. On returning home to be emancipated from the control of his tutor, it was impossible to behold a more graceful young man, and difficult to find a more attaching.

At that epoch of her life, a new sense of uneasiness beset the heart of Matilda. Four years younger than Sir Walter, Constance was now fifteen; and though in childhood accustomed to witness their mutual endearments with satisfaction, she could not divest herself of a feeling of repugnance in witnessing the caresses bestowed upon Walter by the unsuspecting girl.

Already, Constance regarded him with the enthusiastic admiration of the Avesfords, and the tenderness of the fondest of sisters. No person was equal to Walter. Nothing was too good, too great, too noble, for Walter. Her affection was scarcely secondary to her dutiful love for her mother; and when at length the lively, affectionate boy, progressed into the dignified, accomplished young man, the enthusiasm of Constance

knew no bounds.

Lady Norman could not at all times bring herself to recollect that the nominal brother and sister were as completely so in feeling, as the children of one father and one mother; and that the familiarities between them which caused her cheeks to flush, were precisely such as occurred hourly, without notice, between Lord Selsdon and Louisa Farleigh. She persuaded herself that a more than common love instigated Sir Walter's excessive tenderness for his fond and lovely sister.

The false position in which they stood, the false position in which she had assisted to place them, was terribly visited upon

her. She grew suspicious, fretful, unjust. The young people were objects of constant solicitude. When out of sight, she could not rest till she had sought them out. When in her presence, her eyes were ever upon them. Sir Walter's commonest expressions were carefully analyzed. She was always attempting to trace his sentiments to some latent and unexpressed feeling; and, anxious and ill at ease, ended by communicating her uneasiness to those around her.

"Lady Norman has not sufficient confidence in her son," was Mr. Manningham's remark, in his parting interview with Avesford, with whom, throughout their mutual duties, he had maintained friendly relations. "She is too intent upon examining his opinions and checking his expressions, and will end by destroying that happy frankness of character which forms

one of the most attractive characteristics of my pupil."

Certain families of the neighbourhood, on the other hand, attributed her watchfulness to the interested motives which so often inspire the widowed mother of an opulent, only son.

"Lady Norman is afraid that any one should obtain political influence over the mind of Sir Walter," cried Sir Robert Skare-midge, the Tory lessee of Scarwell Park. "Lady Norman and her Radical relations have hugger-muggered the education of the young baronet, in a manner highly unbecoming his situation in the county. And now, they are afraid of his breaking loose among gentlemen of his own station in life, and the right

way of thinking."

How fussy we are about our young baronet!" cried Mrs. Redely, of the Avonwell Forges, on the other hand, glancing at her pretty daughter Amy. "Lady Norman seems afraid of Sir Walter being snapped up if she takes her eyes off him, as she herself snapped up Sir Richard. For so high as my lady may think herself, she was but a Brummagem miss. However, she needn't alarm herself. Nobody in my family has the least notion of taking her place at Selwood Manor, which I suppose

is what her heart is set on."

If the feelings which gave rise to these illiberal comments proved painful during Sir Walter's three months' visit to Selwood, at the age of nineteen, what were they likely to become now that more than a twelvemonth's tour in Europe and the East, had added new graces to his person, new charms to his mind? Emancipated from the control of his tutor, his character had attained strength and independence. Though Manningham was a man of enlightened mind, scorning to maintain the ascendancy of his church by superstitious influence, and valuing the adhesion of a proselyte in proportion to the sincerity of his conviction, his mode of instruction had still in some degree savoured of the priest and the pedant; and Sir Walter's improvement under an enlarged and unshackled intercourse with the world, was perceptible even in his correspond-

Constance alone saw no difference. She had always judged her brother unimprovable. It was only Lady Norman, who, after perusing and re-perusing his letters, on the eve of his expected return to England, trembled at the idea of welcoming to the arms of her daughter this accomplished being, this high-souled and chivalrous young man, this far-sighted sympathizer with the wants, sufferings, and injuries of mankind.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

I'd have you sober and contain yourself; Not that your sail be bigger than your boat. Nor stand too much on your gentility, Which is an airy and mere borrow'd thing From dead men's dust and bones, and none of yours, Unless you make or hold it.

BEN JONSON.

THOUGH Christmas was at hand, Lady Norman's importunities succeeded in drawing the Avesfords from Fern Hill, to welcome to Selwood the arrival of the young baronet. mother would have wished to pass those first days of reunion

exclusively with her son. But Matilda recoiled from the chance of finding herself alone with Walter.

"I don't pretend," said Avesford to his sister-in-law, on the day appointed for his arrival, "that I am not almost as anxious as yourself to see the young fellow again. There is something more gratifying to me than I can express in gathering from all quarters reports of the high character he has attained on his travels, and feeling that I have borne my part in shaping his principles and opinions. But Bessy and I are old-fashioned people. We don't like to be away from home at Christmas. It is not enough for the poor that we fling our alms at their heads, like bones to a dog. Our people at Fern Hill are accustomed to draw nearer to us in winter time. Human benevo-lence, like the robin, is roused up and set a-piping by frosty weather; and it is our habit to examine more intimately into the condition of our humble neighbours at this season of the year. Bessy does not teach her parish schools. But she rewards those who are well reported by her schoolmistress; and the children think more of the few kind words she says to them, than they would of double her gifts. I flatter myself, too, that my old cronies at the almshouses will miss their fireside chat with me. You would be amused to hear the poor old creatures cross-question me every year when I return from the sitting of Parliament. Excuse me, therefore, dear Matilda, if

we beg off in a day or two. Fulfil your engagement at Tuxwell Park for the early part of the holidays; and towards the end of January you must all come together to Fern Hill, that I may see something of Walter before the session calls me to town.'

"You will see him, I hope, in London," replied Matilda, in a "I trust Walter will spend the ensuing season in low voice.

London."

"Why the deuce do you hope that? At his age, he is just as well in the country. Time enough, on the attainment of his majority, to launch into the society into which all young men of Sir Walter's birth and fortune must fling themselves, during their progress into reasonable beings."

"Surely a few months can make no great difference in his

powers of judgment?" pleaded Lady Norman.
"It will make the greatest, in our degree of responsibility for his proceedings," replied Avesford. "Keep him with you "Keep him with you quietly this spring at Selwood. It will be hard if you and Constance, between you, are not able to amuse the young gentleman. Take him to visit Bessy, at Fern Hill. Take him to Woldham. Take him, if you will, to hear his uncle Cruttenden give tongue to Radicalism, loud as his mill-wheels and hot as his furnaces. In the middle of April Walter will be of You may then roast oxen and blaze away with bonfires at Selwood to your heart's content. And, when all that is over, you will still have time for the London season, provided your son requires the change."

Lady Norman sighed. A decided plan had been, as usual, traced out by Avesford, which was, as usual, likely to be followed. For some months to come, she must resign herself to

Walter's domestication with his family.

As the hour drew near for his arrival, her agitation increased. The delight with which his approach was hailed by every human being on the estate, which would have rejoiced the partialities of a parent's heart, roused an involuntary feeling of vexation in that of Matilda. She fancied that, from motives of interest, the poor exaggerated their expressions of attachment to their young master; while as to the Avesfords and Constance,

their glee amounted to childishness.
Sir Walter having announced his intention to arrive by dinner-time, Lady Norman retired to her dressing-room, apart from the gay family party, and was preparing her mind for the events of the evening, when she was startled by a tap at the Whispers being audible without, she concluded that the

housekeeper and her maid were waiting for orders.

"Come in," said she, in her usual gentle voice, without raising her head from the hand on which it was reclining; then, startled by the hurried footsteps which approached her, she turned hastily round to discern the arms of Constance thrown round the waist of her noble-looking brother.

"Mother!" cried Sir Walter, opening his arms to embrace her, without releasing himself from those of Constance. "Dearest, dearest mother, if you knew how I have been longing for this

moment!"

Amid the tumults of her agitated heart, Lady Norman was shocked to perceive that, while his tears fell upon her cheeks, her own eyes remained dry and seared. Her emotion on beholding him was the result of fear and repugnance. She could not do him justice. His filial tenderness would have touched her very soul, had it been the love of some other son for some other mother. But on the part of Walter towards herself, it seemed a mockery. She felt that she should be guilty of a further fraud by cheating that young heart of its affections. Instead of returning the fond and clinging embrace with which he folded her to his breast, Lady Norman disengaged herself abruptly, and sank breathless into a chair.

"The shock has been too much for her. We were wrong not to apprize her of your arrival," said Constance, anxiously offering a glass of water to the trembling woman. "After so long an absence, the delight of seeing you again has been too

overpowering."
"I hoped to have caused you an agreeable surprise by coming a few hours before the appointed time," said Walter, who was now kneeling at Lady Norman's feet, and holding her hands in his own. "But Avesford told me just now I was a blockhead to fancy I gave pleasure by flurrying people's nerves. Forgive me, dearest mother! I was so impatient to behold you again!"

Lady Norman smiled faintly, and imprinted the kiss which this apostrophe appeared to demand, upon the forehead of Sir Walter. The movement, indeed, was spontaneous. At that moment he recalled strongly to her mind, by the force of association, the image of the only man she had ever beheld in a similar position: Sir Richard Norman seemed before her, inspired by the affectionate devotion which brightened their early years of marriage; and her heart warmed towards the

living representative of her husband.

"You are better now,—are you not?" said he, taking her hand, as he watched the colour revive upon her cheek. "Yes, now you are almost yourself again, and younger and handsomer than ever! Who would fancy you the mother of a great grown-up son? Even my little Constance is almost too tall and womanly to appear your daughter. Come hither! I want to have another look at you, Constance!" oried he, rising from Ledy Norman's feet and placing himself in a chair beside her, while he drew his sister upon his knee. "I heard wonderful stories of your beauty and accomplishments, the other day, at Munich, from young Skaremidge."

"Poor Lionel Skaremidge!" observed Constance, with a

smile. "He is a great admirer of mine or mamma's—I hardly know which."

"I know which; because he did me the honour to ask my sanction to your becoming Mrs. Skaremidge. But upon seeing you again, I am not sure that I think you deserving the honour. How immensely she is grown!" continued Walter, turning towards Lavy Norman, after a deliberate survey of his sister. "Her hair so much darker, her appearance so much more womanly."

"And you!" cried Constance, pretending to resent his scrutiny. "Do you fancy that you were past the age of growing when you left England? You have gained three inches, at least. Stand up beside me, Walter. Mamma! Has not my brother gained three inches since we saw him last? See! my

head scarcely reaches his shoulder!"

"It reaches just where I wish it to reach," cried Walter, stooping down and kissing the fair brow that reclined against him. "You are now exactly the right height; exactly my mother's height. My mother's height was always my standard of perfection for a woman. I can't bear a woman to be over-tall. Half her time is taken up in trying not to appear different from the rest of the world. A woman should never be too much remarked."

"You pronounce very boldly upon our sex, Walter," said Lady Norman, feeling the necessity of mixing in the conversation. "We must expect. I perceive, to find a severe critic in you."

"We must expect, I perceive, to find a severe critic in you."
"A partial one," he replied, cordially. "You, my dear
mother, and Constance, and Aunt Bessy, have made me difficult. It is natural I should appreciate strongly the deficiencies
of other women. And now tell me, did you receive my letter
from Calais? Did you expect me to-day?"

"Were you not told down-stairs that the Avesfords came last night from Fern Hill expressly to meet you?" cried Con-

stance.

"True! I forgot it, I forgot them! I seem to forget every-

thing but the happiness of being with you both again."

"Let us go down to my brother and sister," said Lady Norman, more composedly. "Avesford, who loves you like a son, will be mortified, my dear Walter, if you treat him as a stranger."

United with the rest of the little family party, Matilda's embarrassment seemed to subside. She had leisure, while her frank, plain-dealing brother was interrogating the young traveller, to examine the air and countenance of Sir Walter. Never had she seen any one so strikingly handsome; and a touch of boyhood still lingered in his character, which did but enhance the charm of his manly person and spirited address.

"Your mother has been trying to persuade us, Walter, that you will want to be off immediately to London," said Avesford.

"Are you really in so much haste to commence your career as

a man about town?"

"Heaven forbid!" cried Sir Walter. "I have seen enough abroad of what you call men about town, driven by ennui to wander in other countries; and have no ambition to inscribe myself in the muster-roll. But why, my dear mother, did you fancy I should be in haste to leave you and Constance, when I have been wild with joy for the last three months at the

thought of being with you again?"
"Your sister wrote you word, I believe," said Matilda, evading a direct reply to the question, "that we were engaged to spend part of the Christmas holidays with our old friends the

Farleighs?"

"Yes, and I am very willing to go. Had you not made the engagement I should have preferred remaining at home. I have so much to see and to learn about Selwood! Selwood! Remember how little I have been here for the last four years! However, after Tuxwell, we have the whole spring and summer before us. Unless for a flying visit to Fern Hill, I will not stir from Selwood for months to come. The more I have seen of Europe the more I am convinced that, as a residence, no country is comparable with England.'

"And everybody admits Worcestershire to be one of its best

counties and Selwood the prettiest spot in Worcestershire," cried Constance, attacking the prejudices of her brother.

"You and I do,—which for the present may suffice," replied Sir Walter, with a smile. "I am ashamed to own how often, amongst the finest Alpine scenery, or on the lovely shores of the Bosphorus, I have languished after a glimpse of the green knolls of Selwood. I have never beheld a landscape so agreeable to my eye."

"I shall tell that secret to Louisa Farleigh, whom you used confirm your former fancy for her, by expressing a similar opinion." to call your little wife," whispered Constance; "and she will

"No. it would not be natural in her!" cried young Norman. "I would rather hear her assert a preference for Tuxwell Park. It is only you, Constance, from whom I should delight to hear a flourish in honour of Selwood. But tell me a little about the Farleighs. Have they grown up as pretty as they promised?"

"More so, I think. Yet somehow, they disappoint me. They are kind, friendly, and good-humoured; but they seem to distinguish no one, not even each other. All the world is all the world to them. They are too general in their likings and civilities."

"I understand you; though, to do you justice, my dear, it would be difficult to express the thing more confusedly, cried her uncle Avesford. "They have lived too much in society. They are worn too smooth."

"I shall be in no danger from Lady Louisa if she does not distinguish me," added Sir Walter, gaily. "I am fond of being made a fuss with. I beg you to know, Constance, that I was thought a very fine thing last winter at Vienna, and had half a mind to bring you home a gnädige Gräfinn for a sister-in-law; with a Styrian mountain by way of dowry, and a set of drawingroom furniture worked in Berlin stitch by her own fair hands.
"I don't want a foreign sister-in-law," said Constance. "

must have an Englishwoman."

"You are acquainted only with your country-women. you have charming rivals on the other side the Channel. I have lost my heart and found it again, fifty times, since I parted from you."

"That you found it again says little in their favour," argued

Miss Norman.

"Little in mine, I fear. Had they found me worth the

struggle, I was their slave for life."

Pleased by these frank avowals, Lady Norman entered more cheerfully into the conversation; and the families of the neighbourhood of Selwood and Fern Hill were successively passed in review.

"We have a beauty arrived at the Forges, Walter, during our absence," observed Lady Norman. "Miss Redely, I your absence," observed Lady Norman. "Miss think, was still at school when you were last here?"

" Has she turned out an acquisition?"

"Pretty, and underbred. A pert school-girl, who decides on everything with the coarsest self-sufficiency," cried Avesford, who had no patience with the affectation of fine ladyism.

"Fie, fie, uncle! Amy Redely is greatly improved by her

trip to London," remonstrated Constance.

Nothing short of so much levity and vulgarity could have put me out of conceit of so much prettiness," replied Mr. Avesford. "In London, she learnt only the extent to which a pair of white shoulders might be exhibited; and an empty head exposed by flippant attempts at wit. Miss Redely is fated to be the dashing belle of our race-balls and music-meetings: but unless hereafter tamed down by the rough schooling of the world, is never likely to win her way to the respect of society.

"Beauty is an able special-pleader!" observed Sir Walter. "What conquests one sees achieved over the prejudices of society by the mere charm of a prepossessing countenance."

"I grant you," cried Avesford. "But Miss Amy's countenance is not prepossessing. Her face is merely pretty. The

charm of the cestus is wanting.

"In that case, I should prefer Lionel Skaremidge's ugly sisters," replied Sir Walter, carelessly, "who are, at least, unassuming and agreeable. And now tell me, my dear uncle, about your boy. Do you find poor Charles improve in strength under the orthopedic system? Has he given up sea-bathing? Is he able to drive about the grounds at Fern Hill?"

"He is alive," replied Avesford, his demeanour suddenly saddened by recurrence to the fate of the gifted child whose mind seemed endowed with preternatural intelligence at the expense of physical power. "Your letters and presents to him while abroad, my dear Walter, form the treasures of his little life. I need not tell you how much your recollection has gratified his parents. Bessy would not have left the little fellow on any other errand than to visit you after your long absence. Travelling does not agree with poor Charles; so that for both their sakes, I renounce my wife's company when called to London by the duties of parliament."

"We will go and see them during your absence," said Sir Walter. "I shall visit the Farleighs to please my mother; and Charlie to please myself. I have brought him some rattle-traps from the Tyrol. Indeed, my baggage is charged with treasures from all parts of the world, like that of an Oriental bridegroom. Constance must go up to my room and take her choice, before I expose it to a general sack. Till I have a wife of my own," he continued, turning towards Miss Norman, "you are my liege lady."

CHAPTER XXIX.

Ils semblent tont savoir, à leur ton, leur maintien,
Mais ils ne savent rien,—n'apprendront jamais rien;
Parient avec mépris de tout ce qu'ils ignorent,
Et de leur nullité publiquement s'honorent.
Etres inconséquens, neufs et blasés, fiétris
Tels que des fruits sans goût, avant le temps muris.

COLIN D'HARLEVILLE.

THE Farleighs were unaffectedly glad to welcome their friends from Selwood; Lord Farleigh being anxious to ascertain the bent of Sir Walter's politics, and the degree of his ardour as a sportsman; and her ladyship no less so to present to her friend, Lady Norman, the Italian greyhound puppy she had been rearing for her, and exhibit the beauties of a wonderful arabesque pattern, at which she had been working since the beginning of summer. There was an old, easy, comfortable friendship between the two, which had survived even the refrigeration of eighteen years of London dissipation.

The girls, too, had the new waltzes of the season to execute for the admiration of Constance, and were anxious for her opinion touching the cut of their new riding habits. Nevertheless, the feelings and opinions of the two younger ladyships were beginning to cede to the influence of the divining rod

of fashion.

"I am glad Constance is coming," said Lady Sophia to her sister, the night preceding the expected arrival of the

Normana

"To own the truth, I had rather she came when the house was less full of company," replied Lady Louisa. "Lady Norman is a charming woman, and Constance a delightful girl. But they have lived so little in the world that they are up to nothing. One has to explain the commonest things to Constance; and the ordinary incidents of society bring her to blushes and confusion. A person of that sort is a dead weight upon a circle."

"In short, my dear, you wish the Normans had delayed their visit till the marquis and his mother left Tuxwell?" cried Lady

Sophia.

"Frankly, then, yes. Lady St. Aubyn will delight in an opportunity of pointing out to her son the charm of Constance's yea-nay notions and old-fashioned habits. Then, Lord Charles Bartley and Sir Frederick Cranstoun are to be here on Thursday, and Lady Norman's dignity, and Constance's missishness, will bore these men to death. We shall have them declaring,

on their return to town, that Tuxwell was wadded with country neighbours. The last time they were here we had that divine Madame de Vandeuil, and the Hattendorfs.'

"There is one comfort in the change: we are secure from double-dealing on the part of the Normans; which was not the

case with our pleasant foreign friends."

Louisa and Sophia were accordingly almost as warm in their reception of Constance as Lord and Lady Farleigh of Lady Norman. About Sir Walter, they had not at present stooped to concern themselves. He was only a Roman Catholic baronet, brought up among parvenus and radicals. He was nothing to them. Lord St. Aubyn had never heard his name; and Lord Charles and Sir Frederick would probably vote him a snob.

Even the striking advantages of his person said little in his favour. The Ladies Farleigh were of a school who entertain little reverence for personal endowments, unsupported by fashionable distinction. A hunchback of fashion would have stood better with them than an obscure Adonis. They received Sir Walter civilly as an old acquaintance; but were much obliged to papa for carrying him off, and engrossing his atten-

tion with lists of ministerial minorities.

With all their quiet egotism, however, strong in the conquests of a London season, and an excellent standing in the world, Sophia and Louisa were somewhat startled by the increased attractions of Constance Norman. For the first time, they saw her attired in fashionable costume. Sir Walter had commissioned his Parisian friends to assist in selecting for his sister all that a Parisian élégant would lay at the feet of his bride; and Constance, though reluctant to abandon her usual simple style of dress, had not courage to neglect the gifts of her Rich laces, fine embroidery, trinkets, flowers, fans, shawls, chaussures; everything she wore was fresh from the mint of Parisian taste; and to have seen her invested in the graces of the Venus de Medicis, would not have so much excited the jealousy of the London belles. They, who were not accustomed to find themselves thrown into the shade by the charm of newer fashions.

Nothing excites the jealousy of women of the world more keenly than toilet emulation. Beauty is a matter in which "taking thought" or spending money will do nothing. But dress is an affair of volition, and it is therefore a personal reproach to be eclipsed by the good taste of another. So little comprehensible, however, is this weakness to a simple girl, that Constance exhibited her finery in the hope of gratifying her brother, without a suspicion of the clouds gathering on the brows of her fair companions. She had not been four-and-twenty hours at Tuxwell Park before their views towards her

were changed.

"How faded our pink gowns looked to-night beside that beautiful French muslin of Constance's," said Lady Sophia.

"But where on earth has Sir Walter picked up all his taste?" rejoined her sister. "He understands exactly the right thing, and is lighter in hand than even Sir Frederick Cranstoun.

"How bored he will be at Selwood!" mused Lady Sophia." "Lady Norman's humdrum ways will scarcely suit a person accustomed to the gaiety of Paris!"

"I don't know. He seems to have eyes only for his sister. Men like things at home, which they detest everywhere else.

"He is certainly handsome and agreeable," observed her sister, carelessly; "and his flow of conversation told wonderfully to-day at dinner. But wait till you see him in contact with Lord Charles's set. To-morrow he will fail, like a country

actor brought out on the London boards."

Unconscious of the examination to which he was exposed, Sir Walter's demeanour was strictly natural. His homage was due to the Ladies Farleigh under their father's roof. But he did not overlook his sister's claims. And after praising Lady Louisa's performance of Strauss's waltzes, proposed that Constance should give them a newer set, by Lanner, which he had brought over, and which, as the last novelty, was vehemently applauded by the circle surrounding the piano. Miss Norman was entreated to repeat the performance. No one cared now for Strauss. "Strauss had not half the sentiment, half the imagination, of Lanner. Impossible to exceed Lanner's waltzes. Impossible to exceed the justice done them by Miss Norman!"

"Constance is my mother's pupil," replied Sir Walter, proudly, in reply to the interrogations of Lady St. Aubyn. "My

sister has had no advantage of London masters."

"The reason she plays like a gentlewoman and not like a professor," replied her ladyship. "In my young days, amateur music was an agreeable addition to society. But I consider a modern concerto-playing young lady a pest. You might as well attempt to amuse a company by philosophical experiments. Nothing is welcome to a sociable circle which places too much stress on the attention."

Lord St. Aubyn, brought up without an idea of his own, fancied he was confirming his mother's proposition, by adding, "Yes! I never heard a more charming performer than Miss

Norman."

Not every one, present, however, was inclined to be equally complimentary. Lord Charles, Sir Frederick Cranstoun, and a Mr. Merton, who had arrived with them from town, were at the head of that peculiar class of London men who hate every thing with which they are familiar, and detest every person with

whom they are not. Enough for them to find at Lord Farleigh's table a family they had never heard of before, to make them draw up and grow disagreeable. They did not choose to commit themselves in presence of a strange man. How did they know who he might be? The perfection of Sir Walter's and Miss Norman's dress told against them with the fastidious clique. A brilliant toilet upon fashionable people is a fashionable thing; but it converts an obscure individual into a tiger. They heard the handsome stranger addressed as "Sir Walter." But what of that?—He might be the son of a Lombard-street banker or West-end physician. They chose to be on the safe side of things by sitting as far as possible from so equivocal a character, and not interchanging a syllable with any member of his family.

Their suspicion that the handsome Sir Walter was an adventurer, was confirmed by his attentions to old Lady St. Aubyn. Accustomed on the continent to see women of any age or ugliness treated with distinction, and prepossessed by her admiration of his sister, he listened with well-bred courtesy to her tiresome stories; and unprepared for ill-manners in the highborn and highly-educated, he attributed Lord Charles's absorption over the newspaper to the embarrassment of finding himself among strangers, and tried to relieve him by an

attempt at conversation.

But Norman, though honest enough to fall into such a snare, was not dull enough to misapprehend the look of astonishment with which his civilities were received. He resolved to be more cautious in future. Nothing irritated by a species of impertinence which he conceived to be disgraceful only to the perpetrator, Sir Walter resumed his lively conversation with the Ladies Farleigh and Lord and Lady St. Aubyn, as if no check had been offered. The Marchioness had a thousand inquiries to make concerning Paris, her nephew the ambassador, and her various friends in the Faubourg St. Germain; and Norman's answers proved him to have been admitted into the most select circles of Parisian exclusiveism, and Lord Charles began to entertain misgivings as to the justifiability of treating him like a Savoyard.

It was not, however, for so distinguished a member of the listless clique to trouble himself with atonement. Having affronted a man without rhyme or reason, he fancied himself privileged to conciliate him on the same grounds; and after fixing upon Sir Walter that heavy stare of pretended near-sightedness, under cover of which people perpetrate offences against good manners, he was about to address him, when Norman, with a profound bow of mock respect, made off to the other end of the room, and was speedily engaged in conver-

sation with Lord Farleigh and the bigwigs.

"How charming Walter is grown, dear mamma!" cried

Constance to Lady Norman, when lingering that night in her mother's dressing-room, previous to retiring to rest. "His manners are so courteous,—so frank,—so superior to those of any other young man in the house."

"There is a total absence of affectation in him, which is cer-

tainly a recommendation," replied her mother.

"But the nature which he does not disguise by heart is in itself so delightful! Walter unites the good sense of a man, with the sprightliness of a boy."

"Take care how you describe him to others in such glowing colours," said her mother, coldly. "A young girl should never

speak of a young man in terms of enthusiasm.

"Not even of her brother? I should as soon think of checking myself, dear mamma, when uttering a panegyric on yourself!"

"In both instances you would do well to guard your expressions. It is indelicate and ill-bred to indulge, in company,

in family affections."

"In mixed company I should scarcely do so misplaced a thing as eulogize my mother or brother. But to praise to my dear mother her only son, is a different affair? Surely I may expect

you to sympathize in my enthusiasm for Walter?"

"I would rather have you less enthusiastic, even with me. Enthusiasm begets disappointment. The waxen wings of Icarus appear to me to typify enthusiasm rather than ambition. You played very well to-night, Constance," continued Lady Norman, purposely changing the subject; "without making difficulties, and just as I wish to hear you."

"Difficulties, when Walter seemed so anxious that Lanner's

"Difficulties, when Walter seemed so anxious that Lanner's waltzes should receive justice? But I am glad you were satisfied, mamma. Do you think my brother was pleased? He did not seem much struck by Louisa's performance. Yet she has

learned of Moscheles for the last eight years."

"Walter, like yourself, is partial; for Lady Louisa is a first-

rate pianiste."

"Perhaps that is the reason she interested him so little. Walter dialikes everything that resembles art, particularly in women."

"Your brother's opinions when he was last in England were unformed and inconsistent. He is grown more positive; I trust

we may find that he has grown more reasonable."

"You speak, mother, as if you had some grudge against him."
"I do not wish him to obtain unlimited influence over your mind. How do you like Lord St. Aubyn?"

"That silly boy !- I have never even thought about him. A

most insignificant person."

"He has just come into the enjoyment of sixty thousand a year, and two of the finest places in the kingdom. Lady Farleigh fancies him very much taken with Sophia."

"What can it signify? Sophia would not think of marrying such a nonentity; more particularly now that she sees him in hourly comparison with my brother.

"I suspect Lady Sophia is likely to consider Walter the

greater nonentity of the two."

"But even Lord Charles and Sir Frederick Cranstoun are more amusing than Lord St. Aubyn. When Lord Charles does condescend to converse, he has a great deal to say; and when Sir Frederick gets out of his friend's hearing, he is quite a rattle. While Walter was engaged to-night in that interesting conversation with Lord Farleigh and the dean, about popular education on the continent, Sir Frederick kept relating all kinds of entertaining London anecdotes, as if expressly to draw people's attention from it; and Sophy and Louisa laughed so provokingly all the time, that I could scarcely catch a word my brother was saying."

"It was more your business, Constance, to join in the conversation of your young friends, than to appear engrossed by any member of your family. It is scarcely becoming to yield your

whole attention to your brother."

Next morning, as Miss Norman was going down to breakfast on her mother's arm, they fell in on the staircase with Lady St. Aubyn; and Constance was obliged to fall back, while Lady Norman proceeded down stairs with the marchioness. In the hall through which they were to pass, stood Sir Walter, examining a county map. As the elder ladies passed him, he turned round with a respectful salutation. But as they advanced. Matilda noticed the kiss with which the young man greeted his sister. The colour rushed to her face. It seemed as if all her cautions to Constance served only to increase the unreserve springing up between her and her brother.

In the course of the morning, a riding party was proposed. Lord Farleigh's hounds having to meet at a distant covert, Sir Frederick and Mr. Merton alone exhibited sufficient sportsmanship to accompany him; while Lord Charles, Walter, and the young marquis, remained to escort the ladies. But Lady Norman made objections to her daughter joining the party. "Constance was grown so timid that she scarcely liked to trust

her on a strange horse. She hoped they would excuse Constance."

"My sister grown a coward? My sister not like to mount anything but her own mare?" cried Sir Walter, suddenly striking into the conversation. "Why, Constance, this is a shooking account of you! What has altered you so strangely?

You were a bold rider when I left England!

"She met with an accident after you quitted us, and has been nervous ever since," interposed Lady Norman. "And now that Amy Redely excites so much notice by scampering over the neighbourhood, I never allow Constance to go beyond the park gates.'

"We must reform all this, now that I am come home, and she has some one to ride with. I would not have her lose her seat on horseback for the world!" cried her brother. "Constance, I shall have you out with me every day. Depend upon me to bring back your courage!"

Lady Norman felt vexed to hear Sir Walter assume a sort of authority over her girl. She had searcely patience to listen to

the conversation proceeding between them.

"Yes.—you must ride to-day. Lady Louisa and her sister insist upon it; and I insist upon it; and every one insists

If you insist upon it, there is an end of the matter," replied Constance, quitting the room to put on her habit. And the Ladies Farleigh, who chose to monopolize the attendance of the marquis and Lord Charles, were relieved when they found that Sir Walter was to be occupied in overcoming the fears of his sister.

"I will not go," whispered Constance to him at parting,

"unless you promise not to leave my side."

Lady Norman, who, standing at the hall-door, overheard both the whisper and Walter's reply in the affirmative, longed to forbid the expedition. She could picture to herself the admiration with which Sir Walter must contemplate the beautiful figure of Constance, never seen to greater advantage than on horseback; her fair ringlets streaming to the wind, her delicate cheek flushed with the bloom of exercise; while the stiff, constrained persons of the Ladies Farleigh, and their stony, inexpressive faces, afforded a foil to her perfections. But it was too late. The little party was already out of sight.

Could poor Matilda have followed them with her eyes, the fact would have overstepped her apprehensions. The spirited horse on which, from carelessness or malice, poor Constance was mounted, kept her in real, and not altogether groundless alarm. Lord Selsdon had once or twice hunted him; and Lady Louisa, in the wantonness of youthful spirits, choosing to take the first fence on emerging from the park, it required more strength or skill than Miss Norman was mistress of, to restrain her horse from following the example. Agitated, yet controlling her alarm for fear of displeasing her brother, Constance sat fast, while her gay steed profited by every grip or drain upon the green strip of road along which they were cantering, to try the force of her hand. But Sir Walter, when he saw her really frightened and matched beyond her strength, instead of bantering her fears, grew almost as nervous as herself, and never for an instant quitted her.

"I will take Constance home," said he, at length, riding up to the Ladies Farleigh, who were proceeding in high spirits, indifferent to the comfort of their companion. "Her horse is too much for her."

"Let us all return," said Lady Louisa, recovering some

sense of civility on being thus addressed.

"By no means. My sister will insist upon proceeding if she finds herself an obstacle to your ride," oried Sir Walter. "And as she will be safer at home, let me beg of you to take no notice of us."

Acquiescence was prompt on the part of the two girls, who were unwilling to have a pleasant ride interrupted by the ineapacity of their friend; and as it would have been indecorous to pursue their ride, unescorted, with the two young lords, Norman insisted that Lord Farleigh's groom should proceed with the

party. He and his sister required no such attendance.

It unluckily happened that Lady Norman was enjoying a solitary walk on a terrace commanding a view of the approach to the house, when Constance and Sir Walter were descried winding leisurely along the road. Miss Norman's horse was quiet, now that it was parted from its frisky companions; so quiet as to admit of Sir Walter placing his hand upon the pommel of her saddle, as they rode along. Lady Norman was greatly displessed. What had induced them thus to separate from the rest of the party? Why were they thus along together? Why thus needlessly familiar? What would any one think who saw them, as she did, in this unseemly attitude? Nothing could be more unwarrantable,—nothing more indicative of—Of what?

Alas! poor bewildered woman, she had lost all check upon her fears. In a brother and sister, the incident was perfectly natural. The young people were in fact talking of her; praising their mother as she deserved to be praised, and con-

certing schemes for her future happiness and comfort!

CHAPTER XXX.

O she that hath a heart of that fine frame To pay this debt of love but to a brother, How will she love, when the rich golden shaft Hath kill'd the flock of all affections else That live in her?

SHARSPEARE.

THE mother of an only daughter endowed with excellence, beauty, and fortune, wishes seldom to be deprived of her company by an early marriage. To lose her beloved Constance,—her late-born Constance,—her faultless Constance,—was a thing Lady Norman had contemplated with terror. But now, she felt suddenly anxious that her daughter should form a suitable attachment. Before they quitted Tuxwell Park, the Marquis of St. Aubyn made formal proposals for her hand; and though Lady Norman was conscious of the improbability that his unformed manner and unaccomplished mind should have produced a favourable impression, she was almost disappointed by the positiveness of Constance's refusal. Miss Norman said not a word to conciliate the maternal pride of the marchioness, or the self-love of her son; merely stating that her home at Selwood was too happy to admit of a desire for change. "But your brother will marry, my dear Miss Norman,"

remonstrated Lady St. Aubyn.

"My home will not be the less happy," replied Constance with a smile; but Lady Norman fancied that it was shaded by a cast of uneasiness. In vain did the two mothers represent the excellence of Lord St. Aubyn's temper and principles, and the privileges of his high condition. Constance would not hear of him. She did not want to be a peeress. She was not

covetous of castles or diamond necklaces.

Sir Frederick Cranstoun's attentions also tended towards serious declaration. But it was not to a fashionable profligate that Lady Norman wished to sacrifice her child; and his proposals were accordingly forestalled by the most repulsive coldness. It was to him, nevertheless, that Lady St. Aubyn attributed the ill success of her son. The young marquis being too carefully guarded to become the dupe of the listless clique, nothing had remained for Lord Charles and his friends but to turn him to account as a butt. His awkwardness, his effeminacy, his wretched horsemanship, his quizzical toilet, afforded them constant themes for wit and merriment; and though Lady Louisa Farleigh and her sister had their reasons for not joining in the laugh, Constance was more than once betrayed

by high spirits and inexperience into a smile. She saw with what readiness Walter had, in his own case, turned upon the offenders the battery of their impertinence; and accused Lord St. Aubyn of imbecility for being so easily overcrowed.

A week afterwards, as the Normans were discussing round the Avesfords' cheerful fireside at Fern Hill, the pomps and vanities of Tuxwell, Constance was reproved by her mother for having even appeared to sanction the insolence of Lord Charles and Sir Frederick.

"You have little idea," said Lady Norman, "of the pain

inflicted on a timid person by the irony of a coterie."

"But you saw, dearest mother, how quickly their impertinence was silenced by the good sense of Walter," cried Miss

Norman.

"Not by my good sense," interrupted her brother with a ugh. "Guess to what I owed my impunity from their attacks? To my cousinship with a certain Captain Norman of the guards, whom I never beheld; and who, it seems, is one of theirs."

"Lord Mornington's son?" demanded Lady Norman, with an

air of embarrassment.

"Precisely. The moment our relationship was explained, they became my most obedient, humble servants. Lord Charles has undertaken to make a man of me,—that is, a man about town,—whenever I choose to be put up at clubs, or down in visiting lists."

Lord Charles Bartley made rather a good speech in the house, last session," observed Avesford. "But except that the devil can quote Scripture for his purpose, it is incomprehensible where he came by his principles! A born and bred Tory, idle, dissolute, and vain, preaching reform and retrenchment, is an anomaly.

"Experience has perhaps enlarged his views," said Mrs.

Avesford.

"I fear his views are those of his interest, rather than his conscience," said her husband. "He backs the winning horse. There is as much jockeyship in public life as in any other career; and when I find a man professing public opinions six thousand degrees purer and more enlightened than those of his personal practice, I have a right to doubt his sincerity. Lord Charles's politics are those of the constituents, who keep him out of the King's Bench, and may eventually promote him to a place. Or, why should he protect, as a legislator, the welfare of the people whom he defrauds as a debtor, and despises as a dandy? I cannot reconcile so much public virtue with so much private vice."

"Nevertheless," remonstrated Sir Walter, "patriots have in all ages emerged from the school of Epicurus. The myrtle has been torn from more than one enervate brow, to give place to

the mural crown."

"Never, unless where generous and manly qualities were

pre-existent," cried Avesford. "With the exception of hazarding their necks in a fox-chase, what manliness is exhibited by modern exquisites? What is there frank, fair, or honest, in their community? Listen to the details of their money transactions, not with Jews and usurers, but with each other. Look to the yearly events of the turf—the gaming-table -nay, to the common transfer of a hunter from one to another. Was there ever such barefaced indifference to the rules of integrity? Such base desertion of the chivalry of their order? They may talk of radical meetings and democratic writings, my dear Norman. But the higher classes of this kingdom are never so wantonly degraded as by themselves. 'By their works ye shall know them.

"Lord Farleigh seems an amiable man," observed Sir Walter; "respectable in private life, and conscientious in public."

"I cannot call a man conscientious in public life," said Avesford, "who is a stone-deaf enemy to improvement, and a vociferous stifler of inquiry. Men of Lord Farleigh's caste have so much to lose by every popular reform, that delicacy should forbid their being clamorous against measures insur-ing the welfare of millions. Were they to exhibit on any private question the rapacious tenacity they do not scruple to avow in the great national struggle, they would be scouted as shabby fellows. Attack the legality of their tenure of any portion of their private property, and they will answer, Search, Examine! if my claims prove defective, I am ready to renounce them.' Why be less honourable in their mode of dealing with the demands of the people?

"By the way, dear mother," cried Walter, "I can scarcely express to you the kindness I received in Paris from your friend, old Guerchant, the Ministre de la Marine. To his family I was indebted for my private introduction at the cha-

teau, and the favours shown me by the king."

"They were always kind and excellent people," said Lady Norman, in a low voice. "No man do I respect more highly than Admiral Guerchant."

"The old gentleman was rather indignant, however, to find that you had never named him to me as my godfather. In France, the tie of sponsorship is held twice as sacred as in England," observed Sir Walter.

The disastrous moment at which the rite was solemnized my own absence—the difference of religious worship between " faltered Lady Norman, "rendered me blameably negligent. But surely I have frequently cited the Guerchanst to

you as partial friends of your father and of myself?
"Say, rather, as most faithful," replied Sir Walter. "You should hear the old admiral do justice to your courage and presence of mind, when abiding my birth, in the midst of the idle rumours raised by the English as a pretext for cowardly

flight. By the way, his daughter, the Duchesse de Barjac, insisted upon taking me to the old Château de St. Sylvain, where I was born."

"And did you really visit the place?" demanded Constance, deeply interested in details which the habitual reserve of Lady

Norman had enveloped in mystery.

"Only the gardens—the terraces and charmilles of which are still in good preservation. The house is converted into a manufactory; and though I went over it, there was nothing to point out the memorable chamber in which so eminent a personage as Walter Norman saw the light. I was assured that there was an old woman in the village, a Madame Gervy or Jarvais, or some such name, who had been formerly in the service of an English family at St. Sylvain. Do you remember such a person?" said he, suddenly turning towards Lady Norman.

"So many painful reminiscences are attached to that period,"

she faltered, pale as death, and scarcely able to articulate, "that I find no pleasure in reverting to it."

"Let us say no more, then," cried Sir Walter. "But admit, dear mother, that I was justified in making a pilgrimage to a spot where I entered upon the life which your affection has

rendered so happy.'

Constance, with glistening eyes, glanced from the pale face of Lady Norman to the earnest countenance of her brother; feeling that some reply was due to the fervency and grace of his appeal. But Matilda kept at all times a conscientious watch over her lips, lest she should aggravate by hypocrisy the fault with which she evermore upbraided herself; preferring rather to be reviled as lukewarm in her affections, than affect towards Walter the passionate tenderness of a mother.

"Now I come to consider the case, my dear Walter," observed Avesford, his thoughts thus accidentally led back to the peculiarities of his nephew's foreign birth, "it may become hereafter important to you to have a copy of the registry of your baptism. I recommend you to apply to Admiral Guerchant to have an acte de naissance properly made out. Can you remember exactly where the registry took place?" he con-

tinued, addressing his sister-in-law.

"Probably at St. Sylvain. Sir Richard undertook the arrangement."

"The first time I am with you again at Selwood, we will search your poor father's memorandum-book for some allusion to the event," said Avesford to his ward. "We may find the certificate among his papers; if not, you can write to the admiral. He will not mind taking a little trouble for the son of his friend; and if the old woman you heard of were really a household servant of the family, she might be able to put him on the right scent."

"I have commissions to execute for Madame de Barjac," said Sir Walter. "On forwarding them, I will beg the admiral

to procure me the necessary papers."

The subject was dropped, in deference to the presence of the widow, in whom it appeared to revive unpleasant recollections. But from Lady Norman's mind it was not so easily dismissed. That Walter should have been on the eye of an interview with Madame Gervais—even on that fatal spot—the scene of her connivance in fraud—the old woman, probably sinking into that feebleness of years, from whose weakness or compunction confession is so easily obtained—filled her with consternation. The fine open character of the young man forbad all suspicion that more had transpired in his visit to the château than he had avowed. But might not the inquiry, so inopportunely suggested by Mr. Avesford, lead to further exposures, perhaps to the discovery of the truth?

In every way she was miserable! To behold the impostor constantly before her, with Constance in his arms, was a trial her patience could scarcely support; or, on the other hand, to have the truth discovered, the imposture detected, her own honour, her husband's memory, disgraced beyond retrieval, was a prospect still more alarming. The punishment of Lady Norman's fault seemed to hang daily heavier upon her life. She had formerly hoped that time would habituate her to her false position; but experience taught her that time has no

narcotic for the restlessness of an evil conscience.

She rose, the day succeeding this painful conversation. trusting that the whole might have passed from the memory of Walter, upon whom the pleasures and duties of life were exercising such varied influence. Amid the flurry of attaining his majority and entering his public career, Admiral Guerchant, St. Sylvain, and the extrait de baptême, might possibly escape

his recollection.

But on that day arose a source of anxiety of a more painful nature. The infirm son of the Avesfords, attaching and attached as such helpless beings often prove, was suddenly attacked by a spasmodic illness of the most alarming nature. In hopeless grief, the parents hung over the couch of the little sufferer; and Lady Norman and her daughter congratulated themselves that they were on the spot to alleviate the trials of the tender and distracted mother. Though every friend to whom the Avesfords were dear had long indulged in an opinion that the release of the sickly boy would be a mercy to themselves and him, yet when the moment of removal drew near, one and all indulged in prayers that the blow might be suspended. was such intensity of affection between the parents and the poor boy, whose wistful eyes looked up to them with looks of love, that no one could bear to anticipate the moment when those eyes must close for eyer.

The medical attendants who, having tended the ailing child from infancy, seemed to approach his sick-chamber with more pitying faces than the couch of many a more important patient, shook their heads when they saw the feeble frame racked by these new symptoms of disease. The danger was not immediate, but they feared it was irremediable.

"I must be off for town to-morrow," said Avesford, falteringly, to young Norman, the evening after this decree of the physicians had gone forth. "I am pledged to my constituents

to be present at the debate of Thursday.

"Pledged, before you could anticipate this sad crisis in your

family," interposed Sir Walter.

"Pledged, as we pledge ourselves at the altar, for better for worse—in sickness or in health," replied Avesford, with assumed composure. "My duty calls me to my post. God forbid that I should sacrifice the interests of which I have made myself the depositary!"

"Nevertheless, the imminent danger of an only child---"

"The danger, I am assured, is not imminent; and were it so, my presence here would avail nothing," replied the father with quivering lips. "It is only for the assuagement of my own anxiety that I desire to remain; and what are my feelings compared with the great progress of constitutional reform? I must go, my dear Walter! Do me only the favour to relinquish your pleasures when I dare not relinquish my duty. Remain here to counsel and comfort my Charles's unhappy mother!"

Walter Norman pressed the hand extended towards him, and found that it was cold as death. There were no tears in the eyes of Avesford. He evidently did not choose to be seen of men unmanned by domestic affliction. But it was not the sternness of the stoic, beneath whose cloak the fox is gnawing; for immediately afterwards, in attending to the sorrows of his

wife, his voice became broken and unintelligible.

He went; and young Norman fulfilled his promise of filling in the house the place of the absent master. But his presence in the sick-chamber, where no word was to be spoken, no movement to be hazarded, proved a restraint; and Mrs. Avesford would not hear of his paying them more than occasional visits. It was enough to engross the constant companionship of Lady Norman. Constance and Walter were too young to be afflicted by the continual spectacle of grief and pain.

"Make your sister ride and walk with you as usual, my dear boy," said she to her nephew, "and you will relieve me from one source of anxiety. Constance is delicate. The spectacle of my child's sufferings is too much for her. Persuade her to accompany you every morning to the water-side. The sea-air

will re-invigorate and support her."

Walter readily obeyed. It was impossible for Lady Norman

to raise objections to a scheme so natural. Yet, every day, when their absence grew longer and longer, and their cheeks more flushed with health and happiness, she entertained a wild apprehension that they took too much pleasure in each other's

company.

Yet what could be more natural than that Constance, estranged from companionship of her own age, should rejoice in the society of one to whom her hoard of innocent reflections might be unfolded? Between familiar friends, nothing conduces to unreserved communication more than a solitary walk. Walter had a thousand curious anecdotes to relate, and customs to describe, of the various lands he had visited. Like most persons whose education is completed abroad, he possessed the talent of narration; was not afraid of hearing his own voice; not ashamed of trying to interest others in that which had interested himself. Italy, Greece, Germany, Denmark, Russia, supplied his memory with a thousand amusing traits and beautiful landscapes, which he delighted to describe when he saw how eagerly Constance listened to the description.

And thus the heavy eyes and saddened countenance with which she emerged from the house of mourning gradually gave place to the invigorating impulses of youth and joy; and fresh colours bloomed on her cheeks—fresh spirits beamed in her eyes—while, leaning on his arm, she forgot both time and place in the details of his varied conversation. Every walk became the precursor of another. They descried new objects to be visited, new landscapes explored. The tide was to be up at such an hour; or the sands at low water were to afford them new ground

for enjoyment.

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Nor was the discourse of the young Normans always of a frivolous nature. The afflicting scene from which they emerged for the enjoyment of the open atmosphere, and the contemplation of the beauties of nature, sobered their gaiety. Both were beginning to conceive opinions and reform their principles, according to their opening insight into the ways of the world; and these were to be compared, argued, adapted, or rejected. Walter became almost affected when by degrees the sanctuary of his sister's golden thoughts and pious feelings was unveiled to his view:—his arguments were silenced—his eyes dazzled—for he saw that the place whereon he stood was holy ground. Even his anxiety to strengthen her mind by a more steadfast view of the harsh realities of life, gave place to his reverence for such purity of spirit.

Constance had, in fact, a mighty object at heart. The difference of faith which seemed to divide her immortal soul from that of her brother was an obstacle to her happiness. She knew that, by their father's will, Walter was to be reared a Catholic; but that no impediment was to be placed upon a change of faith arising from conviction. That conviction she dearly longed to

She perceived that his long residence at Rome had opened the eyes of her brother to abuses, which it was easy to place in a still stronger light; and though deeply conscious of her incapacity for the task of conversion, she possessed more advantages than she was aware of. There was no irony, no mockery, in her gentle pleading, no assumption of authority, no pretence at wisdom. She spake neither with the tongue of men nor angels, but with the gentle tongue of woman-a voice, when lawfully employed, how convincing! Those truths which the mildest of mothers had impressed upon her own veneration, the mildest of sisters strove to impress upon that of her brother.

Sir Walter listened in silence; if not convinced by her arguments, touched by her eloquence. Often when she had ceased speaking, he longed to entreat her to begin again, that he might once more revere the sweetness of soul suggesting such just and heart-riving expressions. Though they sometimes prolonged their walk to the hour when a winter sunset reddened the sky and the twilight damps of the shrubberies softened the air, yet on reaching the hall-door he would invite her to take another turn. It was so much more agreeable to have Constance leaning on his arm and soothing him with her gentle philosophy, than to return to the contemplation of unassuageable pain and unconsolable grief.

On such occasions, Lady Norman became almost harsh in her reproval of their truancy. What right had Sir Walter to hazard the health of his sister by exposure to the evening dew? What motive to induce her to loiter by the shore when storms were blowing, and snow or rain impending? If Constance had so wild a propensity to contemplate at any cost the phenomens of nature, it was her brother's duty to oppose her indiscretion.

Walter was wonderstruck on perceiving with how strange an expression of countenance these remonstrances were delivered. The first time his usually gentle mother had occasion to repeat her reproofs, her eyes sparkled and her colour went and came. But as they were standing in the ante-room adjoining the sick-chamber of poor little Charles, she could not indulge in a full

avowal of her displeasure.

Again, however, the offence was renewed; for Lady Norman's limitations of their walks began to be unreasonable. She soon decided that they must not outstep the boundary of the pleasuregrounds; and as these limits unluckily extended to the ascent of a craggy cliff, from whence a splendid marine view, with all its variations of light and shade, was discoverable, Constance and her brother found it impossible to resist one evening their desire to view the setting sun from that elevated spot. On their return, they learned that Lady Norman had been inquiring for them, and on entering her room found her in tears—the severest rebuke they had yet received. Kneeling before her, Constance

promised not to offend again. But she framed her promise in terms of such absolute disposal over the movements of Sir Walter, that Lady Norman experienced a still deeper wound

from her submission.

Even pre-occupied as she was, Lady Norman's susceptibility did not escape the observation of Mrs. Avesford. But she familed that sympathy in her affliction disturbed the even temper of Matilda. Many people seem out of humour when out of spirits. But Lady Norman's disposition was not of this unreasonable class. She was usually forbearing, humane, gentle; and Mrs. Avesford at length began to apprehend that some unexplained calamity was afflicting her mind. Walter might have formed some unworthy attachment, or Constance might oppose some girlish obstacle to prospects of establishment which her mother was not at liberty to reveal.

One day when little Charles, after hours of protracted torment, had fallen into a gentle slumber, rendering it prudent for those who were watching to repair to the adjoining room, the two sisters sat beside the window—Mrs. Avesford with a book in her hand, which she was not reading; Lady Norman with work in hers, over which her tears were falling while she pre-

tended to work.

"My dearest Matty," said the former, extending her hand towards her sister's knee, after watching her for some minutes in silence, "why deny me the joy of comforting your troubles? God knows, my only consolation is in the solace you afford to mine."

But Lady Norman, though she pressed the hand extended towards her, remained silent. To rally her spirits or chide back her tears was impossible; to admit their origin, equally out of the question.

"You have something on your mind," pursued Mrs. Avesford; "and what can weigh on a mind like yours unfit to be

confided to a friend?"

Still Lady Norman replied not. A profound sigh admitted

the truth of her sister's assertion.

"I could almost upbraid you," resumed Mrs. Avesford, "for trifling with the blessings of Providence. Consider the gifts you enjoy! Health, prosperity, and the love of two noble children, who have grown to maturity under your eyes, in goodness, beauty, and intelligence, all that the heart of a parent can desire. Reflect upon the difference of your fate and mine! The comfort of my future years concentrated in the poor, frail, tormented being, suffering in yonder bed;—his utmost happiness, respite from pain,—his habitual existence, torture. Yet even with this affliction before me I dare not repine. I should fear that some misfortune might overtake my husband in retribution of my ingratitude."

"I admit that I am unreasonable," replied Lady Norman,

attempting to rally her spirits. "I expect impossible things in requiring that the heart over whose opening qualities I have watched for eighteen years should remain exclusively my own. I was wrong not to calculate upon the influence of time, the

influence of others.

"You do not mean that you are jealous of Constance's affection for her brother?" cried Mrs. Avesford, fancying herself suddenly enlightened. "Oh! my dearest sister, beware how you embitter your happy existence by such weakness—such wickedness! Forgive me!" added she, as she saw the tears steal once more down the pale cheeks of Lady Norman. "But I love you so dearly, Matty, that I tremble at the idea of your estranging your children's affections by over-exaction. Never was there so sweet—so loving a creature as that girl of yours. Constance worships the print of your footsteps in the dust. But would it be natural to love her brother less tenderly? I should detest Constance if she did not prefer him to every living being beside yourself; and detest Walter if he did not fully return her affection. Avesford is always in admiration of the intensity of their mutual attachment."

Lady Norman shuddered.

"No human being," said she, "can place himself in the position of another, however close their intimacy. Walter and Constance, on the eve of forming attachments and engagements that must insure their separation, cannot add to their happiness by cultivating a worship that may prove offensive to the husband or wife of either. Had I felt for a brother of my own age the enthusiasm which my poor girl cherishes for hers, it would have been the cause of scrious estrangements between

Norman and myself."

"Sir Richard Norman was an exception to most rules, in the conduct of his domestic affairs," remonstrated Elizabeth. "Forgive me, therefore, if I entreat you not to discover to your children the jealousy you have avowed to me. One remonstrance of the kind to Constance, would create reserves between you; alienate her confidence from her mother, and redouble her love for Walter. Believe me—"

A deep moan interrupted a colloquy which might perhaps have led to wider disclosures. In a moment Mrs. Avesford was by the sick-bed of her child; anticipating the wishes, and soothing the unexpressed anguish of the patient boy, by the

tenderest endearments and exhortations.

CHAPTER XXXI.

C'est mon monde à moi ;—un monde de rubans et de manchettes ! M. DE SENNETERRE.

LORD FARLEIGH'S family was now settled in London, preparing for the opening campaign; and just as his lordship expected to find, every succeeding November, in trying his favourite coverts, double the sport of the preceding hunting-season, his lordship's wife and daughters seemed to fancy that novel pleasures were to be found in their favourite resorts of balls and operas. Not that Lady Farleigh was a finessing mamma. Too indolent for exertion of any kind, her pet fancywork and pet lap-dog monopolized her attention; the young ladies, on whose education had been expended such a prodigious outlay of governesses and masters, being by this time, it was to be hoped, capable of taking care of themselves. There could be no doubt that proper alliances would come in search of the two good-looking daughters of an earl, who gave such good dinners, and professed the good old creed of Toryism.

Lady Louisa, however, was by no means satisfied at the tardiness of their arrival. She was too persuaded of her merits not to feel indignant at having been outrivalled with the Marquis of St. Aubyn, in her father's country-house, abounding with all the appliances and means of conquest, by a simple country-girl, like Constance Norman. An object of flattery from her birth, grandmothers, nurses, waiting-maids, governesses, masters, had united to inflate her young mind into overweening self-esteem. The claims of others she had never heard brought into competition with her own; and piqued by the unexpected discovery that the indiscriminating world might be tempted to desory superior merit elsewhere, the mortified beauty ran some risk of throwing herself away in marriage, to prove that she need not be an old maid like her aunt Lady Emily. She was ready to flirt with Sir Frederick Cranstoun or Captain Norman, or the attachés of merely the foreign embassies, to mark to Lady St. Aubyn her contempt of the desertion of her son.

Lady Sophia, on the other hand, having survived by a season her loss of Lord Meldrum, was not insensible to the merits of the handsome young baronet of Selwood. Sir Walter was an old acquaintance, their parents were still older friends. Her brother was delighted with his manly spirit, and her father

with the rent-roll of his estates. Sir Walter had informed her, indeed, that he disliked London life. But it was during the hunting-season; a period of the year when few young men know how to appreciate any object but a fox's brush. Lady Sophia was, therefore, still on the look-out for his arrival in town; in the hope of accelerating his movements, she even addressed a letter to Constance, describing the brilliancy and pleasantness of London. But the flippant epistle was forwarded from Selwood to Fern Hill, where the Normans were occupied with the sorrows of a death-bed. Constance threw it, half-perused, aside; that she might relieve her mother in her watch over the dying boy.

But Avesford, having discharged his duty heroically in the great debate where the influence of his eloquence was required, had now paired off with some gouty idler, and returned to support the sinking spirit of his wife, and sustain in its last agonies, the beloved child passing through momentary clouds

to eternal sunshine.

The little family circle was overwhelmed with sadness. The Avesfords were too generally beloved for their silent affliction not to command a sympathy rarely accorded to vociferous grief. There was something inexpressibly affecting in the thoughtful tenderness with which the expiring child struggled against his torments to spare the feelings of his parents; and in the inquiring, bewildered look which, during the last night of his existence, overspread his little wasted, waxen face, as if awed by the sense of dawning peace, and perplexed by the thought of coming immortality. Avesford sat silent by the bedside, holding the hands of his wife, while he watched the exhaling breath of his only child. Not a murmur escaped his lips; but those who were standing near him noted from the visible pulsation of his temples, how terrible a strife of anguish was passing within.

At length, Constance, unable longer to support the tension of feeling caused by this prolonged wretchedness, crept from the chamber, to give unrestrained course to her tears; and Sir Walter, noticing that Lady Norman's position beside the child forbad her to follow, hastened after his sister, whose pale face announced indisposition as well as distress. Sir Walter led her to the library sofa; reclining on which, a burst of tears relieved her overcharged heart. The afflicted girl was in no condition to take note of the passing minutes, while she sat concealing her face in her brother's bosom. Her thoughts were raised in prayer to Heaven; prayer that mercy might be shown to the expiring child, as well as to his sad survivors; prayer that absorbed every sense and every faculty; till she was startled by the voice of her mother severely addressing her.

"Is this a time, Constance," cried Lady Norman, "to mark

your indifference to my wishes? Return with me to your family. You shall not remain here."

"My dearest mother," interposed Sir Walter, apprehending from the wildness of her air that affliction had disturbed her reason, "Sit down, I beseech you, a moment, and compose yourself. Constance will take your place for a time in the sick room. You need refreshment. You need rest. I will not have you sit up another night."

"You will not have me?" cried Lady Norman, half frantic on perceiving that he did not withdraw his arm from the waist

of Constance.

"You are not equal to these exertions," he continued, in a soothing tone. "Were my uncle and Mrs. Avesford less engrossed by their miseries, they would feel the impropriety of so severely taxing the strength of two delicate beings, like you and Constance. See!" oried he, drawing Miss Norman closer to his bosom, "she is still trembling and exhausted. As to yourself, mother, I can scarcely recognise you. Compose

yourself, I entreat you."

Lady Norman was indeed in a state of strange excitement. Overpowered by efforts made throughout the day to repress her feelings, her face was almost convulsed as she stood witnessing the endearments between Constance and her brother. But at that moment, an unusual stir in the corridor apprized them that some direful event had taken place in the sick-chamber; and Avesford appeared, conducting his almost unconscious wife.

"Comfort her!" faltered he, addressing Constance and her mother, as he placed her between them. "All is over. Our poor boy is released!"

CHAPTER XXXIL

Je meurs! De leur froide haleine M'ont touché les sombres autans ; J'ai vu comme une ombre vaine S'évanouir mon printemps! Tombe! feuille éphémère! Voile aux yeux ce triste chemin ; Cache au désespoir de ma mère La place où je serai demain!

MILLEVOYE.

THE ensuing week, entailing such solemn duties towards the living and the dead, subdued the perturbed spirit of Lady Norman. So long as the mortal remains of a beloved object abide in a house, a sacred influence seems to predominate within its walls, to the extinction of every human passion.

All that remained to the afflicted parents of the little being to them so precious, so unimportant in the eyes of the world, the infirm child bestowed upon them in the midst of their strength and prosperity as if to remind them that their destinies were in the hand of One who was stronger and mightier than they, having been consigned to the grave, it was decided that Mrs. Avesford should accompany her husband to town, whither he was peremptorily recalled by his parliamentary duties; while Walter, who had law-business to execute, was to bear them company for a week or two; his mother and sister returning quietly to Selwood Manor.

This project was a comfort to Lady Norman. She was in fact chiefly instrumental in forming the arrangement. Yet, on finding herself alone in the carriage with Constance, she experienced, for the first time in her life, unwillingness for the tête-à-tête. The violence into which she had been recently betrayed must appear so extraordinary to the gentle girl who had hitherto been treated with mildness and affection! But Constance was the last of human creatures to resent anything proceeding from her mother. Their recent affliction had produced so many new perceptions and emotions, that she fancied the momentary alteration of Lady Norman's manner a consequence of the inexplicable influence of grief. Her mother's mind had been momentarily distracted by the death of her nephew.

To refrain, therefore, from expressing herself as usual concerning Walter, out of deference to her mother, did not occur to her mind. The journey from Fern Hill to Selwood, was one which at all times exercised a dispiriting influence over the mind of Lady Norman. Though more than sixteen years had

clapsed since the loss of her husband, never did she set off from the Avesfords' door, without recalling to mind the day when, proceeding thence for the first time in all her pride of happiness, she had been suddenly plunged into despair; and Constance, remarking a despondency the motive of which she readily conjectured, fancied she was doing wisely and kindly by trying to divert her mother's attention from past sorrows, by citing her present sources of joy.

"I wonder whether Walter will keep his promise of being at home next week?" said she, after they had performed nearly

half their journey in silence.

"You surely do not wish him to quit the poor Avesfords so long as his company appears a comfort to them?" replied

her mother.

"It would be better for them to be compelled into society that would be a greater restraint than Walter's. My brother is so attached to them,—so full of sympathy for their sorrows,—so gentle and affectionate in his manners, and was himself so fond of that poor little fellow,—that he will only assist in cherishing their grief. For their sakes, therefore, as well as ours, I think he would be better at Selwood,"
"But not for his," said Lady Norman. "It is time that Walter should learn something of the world."

"Has he not been living in the world for nearly four years

past?" said Constance, with some surprise.

" Not in the English world. The society of England is a thing apart; and so absolute in its forms and arbitrary in its customs, that a young man brought up, like most Roman Catholics, in retirement or on the continent, labours under disadvantages on his entrance into public life. In Walter's case, these are increased by a long minority, and the want of family connection. The longer he defers his entrance into society, the greater will be his difficulties."

"But what difficulties await a young man of his position and

fortune?

"As he is likely to live among his equals in rank and for-

tune, these will afford him no distinction.

"But his talents,-his manners! At Tuxwell he was distinguished, not only above his equals in rank, but his superiors. How popular my brother becomes with every one he speaks to !"

"The Farleighs, as old friends of his father, are partial and

over-indulgent.

"But the Dean of Gloucester was not a friend of poor papa (I think you told me you had not met before)? And I heard the dean remark to Lady Farleigh that he had never seen a young man of Walter's age so full of information, yet so diffi-dent and unpresuming."

"The dean is an ardent politician, and may hope to bring

over Walter to his side."

intending to be polite to Lady Norman. "It's a curious thing enough that your ladyship, having but two, there should be so little likeness as between Miss Constance and your son; one so dark, t'other so fair; one on so large a scale, t'other so slight. Redely was saying that they looked far more like husband and wife than brother and sister. I suppose it comes from one being born in France and t'other in England. After all, maybe, it's best for a young lady to be fair, and a young gentleman to be brown. Dark men wear best, and fair women, and make the prettiest couple, too. We did hear, ma'am, that Sir Walter was very much taken at Tuxwell with Lady Sophy Farleigh. Now her complexion—"

"My brother admire Lady Sophia Farleigh?" interrupted

Constance, with an incredulous smile.

"A young gentleman's family is not always the first to be informed of his likings and dislikings. And I can assure you, Miss Norman, that my housekeeper had a letter from her nices, which is young lady's maid at Tuxwell, to say there was bets laid in the steward's room of a match betwirt the young people before the end of the London season."

"Walter will be at home next week," said Constance, "so that we shall soon learn the truth of the rumour." The moment the Redelys had taken leave, she flew to her room to search for Sophy Farleigh's neglected letter, and ascertain whether it betrayed any expectations confirmatory of Mrs. Redely's intel-

ligence.

But though it was clear that, at the time of writing, no understanding subsisted between the parties, Miss Norman fancied she could discover indications of interest on the part of Lady Sophia, such as, with her brother in town, and probably a constant visitor at Lord Farleigh's, might ripen into a nearer regard. Sir Walter, like most young men of his age, was an indifferent correspondent. It was not from his own pen they were likely to have an exact account of his movements; and his sister accordingly became seriously uneasy lest the inventions of the servants' hall should be verified. As a girl, she had been girlishly fond of the Farleighs. As a young woman, she was consoious of their heartlessness and scheming. But as a sister-in-law, she disliked all thoughts of either. Walter, her darling, warm-hearted Walter, deserved something better than to become a secondary object to such a wife as was to be expected from a mere girl of fashion.

Full of this "darling and warm-hearted Walter," she now directed her steps towards his room, which was at the extremity of the gallery in which her own and her mother's were situated. It had been his from the period of Mr. Manningham's instalment at Selwood; and during his absence, Constance occasionally visited it, rather to see that her brother's belongings were kept in order, than as a matter of sentiment.

It was, in fact, a complete young man's room; selected because overlooking a stable-yard, and disfigured by all sorts of unsightly treasures; a gun-rack, a bearskin, by way of hearthrug, and a hammook, by way of bed. Upon the chimney-piece, was the jowl of an immense pike (landed by Walter at twelve years old), curiously preserved in a glass-case, with a pied pheasant (shot by him two years later), as its companion. In an oldfashioned bookcase were divers works upon farriery and angling, with his whole collection of Stonyhurst classics; among whose torn and shabby calfskin were to be distinguished a few spruce prize-books, in gilt morocco, "the gift of his attached friend, Rochus Manningham," such as "Locke's Human Understanding," "De Lolme's British Constitution," and a superb edition (a farewell gift) of "Eustace's Italy." On a stand near the bookcase were a pair of old-fashioned globes, on which strange defeatures were written by school-room abuse; a tiger hunt having been sketched with a crowquill by young Norman on the area left mysteriously blank by geographers in the infancy of African discovery, and groups of leviathans and walruses in the then chartless polar seas. While the celestial globe displayed, crowning the fat and starless sides of Cetus, a striking likeness of Lady Norman's globose old housekeeper!

Over the fireplace, framed in black, and glazed in glass of village green, hung the portrait of a favourite grey poodle, named Titus, the first attempt of Constance in water-colours, the head of which not a little resembled the learned noddle of a barrister in his forensic wig. The tables and chairs, though originally of rich materials, bore evidence of having been occasionally used as a carpenter's bench, bookbinder's shelf, or lithographic press; the young baronet, to whose eye that workshop of many trades abounded in pleasant reminiscences of boyhood, having not only entreated that they might never be replaced, but that even the charred circle, traced by a redhot glue-pot on the caken floor, might be suffered to remain uneffaced.

To this pantechnicon of manly arts and sciences, did the gentle Constance now inopportunely repair. In her brother's absence, that room appeared his especial home. Its very atmosphere was scented with the Russia-leather travelling trunks of Sir Walter, which communicated to his clothes their peculiar aroma; and from the double barrels of Nock, down to the ivory dog-whistle, not an object around her but was more particu-

larly the property of her brother.

The motive of Miss Norman's visit was not merely a desire to look upon these familiar things, or include in thick-coming fancies touching their owner. She had completed, at Fern Hill, some water-colour drawings, from sketches of Morean scenery contained in her brother's sketch-book, and wished to surprise him with the gift of his own productions, transferred as it were from prose to poetry. Simple frames had been procured at Liverpool for these drawings; and though it was by no means her intention to keep so trifling a circumstance a secret from her mother, the state of Lady Norman's feelings, and the affliction of the family, would have rendered an immediate allusion

to them trifling and unfeeling.

She was now about to hang up the pictures previous to Walter's return. She wished him to see how much he had been thought of during his absence; and after a deliberate examination of lights and shades, she fixed upon two panels opposite his bed as advantageous to her performances. It was only to remove from the hooks already fixed there, two prints of Warwick Castle, chiefly remarkable for their bold defiance of perspective; and Santa Maura and the Lencadian promontory were displayed in their stead, arrayed in those vague and aërial tints, with which Copley Fielding or Cattermole delight to envelop the mysteries of nature.

Having fixed them to her liking, Constance sat down beside the hammock in one of the most notched and discoloured of Sir Walter's favourite chairs, to contemplate her handiwork; unconsciously leaning her cheek upon her hand, while demurring whether her Ægean sea might not be a thought too blue, or her Ionian sunset a shade too purple—when, lo! the door burst open, and her mother, pale and indignant, stood before her.

"What are you doing here, Constance?" cried Lady Norman, whose countenance derived a cadaverous hue from con-

trast with the deep mourning in which she was attired.

"I often come here, mamma," replied Miss Norman, startled into a blush. "Often, when my brother is at Selwood, and often when he is away.

"Whether he is absent or present, I desire you will never enter the room again," replied the agitated Lady Norman. "But will not Walter think it very odd—very unkind—if,

instead of visiting him as usual, when his drawing or bookbinding is about, I have to say that you have ordered me to refuse?

"Can you not leave it to his delicacy to suggest," said Lady Norman, "that there are eight rooms open below, in which at

all hours of the day you can meet unmolested?"

"My dear mother, if you object, I will never again cross the threshold," cried Constance. "I came hither only to hang up yonder drawings, intended as a present to my brother."

Lady Norman cast her eyes in the direction pointed out. The paintings seemed, to her disordered mind, to have been finished

and the frames procured in deliberate secrecy.

"You, perhaps, remember the subjects in Walter's album?" pursued Constance in an extenuating tone. "I have only filled out and amplified his outline."

"Have the goodness to take them down again," said Lady

Norman, "I do not choose that he should find them hanging

there."

Miss Norman hesitated. "I finished them expressly for my brother!" pleaded she, in a tone tremulous from disappointment. "Ever since his return to England, Walter has been asking me to undertake a drawing for him. The picture in oils of his own painting which he sent to London to be framed, was intended for my dressing-room; and I shall be deeply mortified if you forbid me to give him these drawings in return."

Lady Norman made no reply. She began silently to remove the pictures from the wall, the tears of Constance now

burst forth.

"Indeed, mother, you are wrong," said she, moved beyond her patience, "to take so much pains to lessen the affection between Walter and myself. Heaven knows my love for him does not diminish by a single grain my respect and attachment towards my mother. But I should deceive you if I did not candidly declare that nothing you can say or do will prevent my cherishing for him the firmest attachment. You are unjust towards us both, in wishing that it should be otherwise."

"Unhappy girl!" cried Lady Norman, letting fall the pictures she held in her hand. "Are you bent on goading me into declarations that may prove the ruin of the family? This man whom you caress as a brother, whom you love with such

dangerous, such mistaken affection----"

"Mother!" faltered Constance, grasping Lady Norman's arm,

and gasping for breath.

"Is no more to you than a stranger, Constance! Walter Norman is not my son. Walter Norman is not your brother!"

It was no moment for further explanations. The agonized girl had fallen at the feet of her mother in a state of insensibility.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

I had a thing to say—but let it go! The sun is in the heavens, and the proud day, Attended with the pleasures of the world, Is all too wanton and too full of gauds To give me audience!

SHARBPEARE.

The following day, at noon, Lady Norman was still watching the heavy slumbers produced by the opiates it had been found necessary to administer to her daughter, in the intervals of the nervous tremors into which Constance had fallen on recovering from her swoon. A hope had presented itself to the mother's mind, that, on waking, the sufferer might fancy all that had transpired the frightful delusion of a dream. The repentant woman could not forgive herself for having allowed herself to be surprised out of a secret so long and painfully preserved. She was prepared to treat the whole as a chimera of her daughter's brain, and to keep for the future a more prudent guard over her lips.

But these hopes evaporated when consciousness was gradually restored to the affectionate girl, whose strength had failed under that sudden sentence of bereavement. To learn that he whom she had so long loved as a brother was lost to her for ever, had frozen the warm current of her blood. She awoke from her lethargy like a person stunned and bruised by some terrible

blow.

"Is this your hand, mother?" she faltered, seizing that of Lady Norman, which was lying on her pillow. "Have you been with me all this time? I fancied I had left you. I fancied I had received some cruel injury, and quitted Selwood for ever. Have I been ill, mother? My arm is bound up, —my head is stiff. Have I been bled? What has been the matter?"

"A dizziness,—a sudden faintness," faltered Lady Norman.
"True, I remember now;—I was brought hither out of
Walter's room. What can have made me ill? Was there not
something—some disappointment about my brother? Is Walter
come home?"

"Sir Walter is not here," replied Lady Norman. And the dryness of her tone brought back the fatal truth to the recollec-

tion of the unhappy girl.

"Oh, mother !—I remember all now!" cried she, letting fall her head on her pillow. "I remember the dreadful sentence

which deprived me of my senses. Were you sporting with me:—were you trying my courage:—Say, yes!—Tell me that you wanted only to ascertain the extent of my affection for him."

But Lady Norman could not make the desired declaration. She could only say, "Compose yourself, my dearest child. Unless you wish to procure the rain of Walter Norman, be

calm, be cautious!"

"It is true, then?" said Constance, faintly, raising her eyes iowards Lady Norman. "I have lost my brother, -my friend, -my companion. Oh, mother! why have you deprived me of the playmate of my childhood!" And greatly to her relief,

tears now flowed from the burning eyes of the invalid.

Lady Norman felt that it was not the moment to enter upon her own vindication. "You are not yet able to listen to the details of this unhappy story," said she. "When I find you restored to self-control, you shall know all. It has required much, Constance, to bring from the lips of your mother an avowal that must lower her for ever in your estimation, as the abettor of an unpardonable fraud. But for years, my child, has the hand of Heaven been heavy on me. For years have I been assured that chastisement was awaiting me where it would be screet to bear. It was in you, Constance, the child of my pride and my affection, that my guilt was to be punished. It was you who were to suffer; you who were to be made a sacrifice! I saw you becoming the slave of an unlawful affection,

and rushed in to save you from destruction."
"You are in error," replied Constance, with mournful composure. "So long as I believed Walter to be my brother, where was the danger for me? It is only now perhaps that my trials

are beginning."

"They must arise, then, from your own rashness," cried Lady Norman, with a look of consternation. "Walter has no more idea of the truth, than you had yesterday. He must never know it,—never suspect it. He, at least, is guiltless of reproach. It is your father and mother. Constance, who are to blame; and the slightest indiscretion on your part would betray your parents to infamy."

"I will be careful," murmured Miss Norman, with a wistful

look of bewilderment.

"Walter is a foundling, sprung from the lowest grade of the French people, and wantonly adopted as Heir of Selwood to gratify the pride of your childless father. But he has been trained in honourable sentiments, and principles of uprightness and integrity, and were the slightest suspicion of the truth to reach his mind, he would instantly reveal all, and renounce the honours and fortune forced on his adoption."

"He would do well," murmured Constance, in the same tone

of unnatural composure.

"He would do well to obey the dictates of his conscience. But what right have I, pledged by a solemn oath to my husband to uphold this imposition, to sanction his being reared in luxury and honour, in the bosom of an affectionate family. in the respect of a multitude of dependents, only to cause him, on arriving at man's estate, to be cast out to ruin and disgrace?-I love Walter,—I appreciate his excellence, his nobleness. It was only while apprehending danger from your infatuation, Constance, that my heart was irritated against one who has grown up with me in the love and duty of a son. I could not support the spectacle of his degradation. I promised the dying Sir Richard Norman to be a mother to the boy. It is not from my quiver that the arrow must be launched against him.

"He, at least, has done no wrong," faltered Constance.
"Nor must he suffer wrong. Enough that I have violated my solemn engagement for the preservation of my child. She must not make me the origin of a deeper sin, by allowing the

smallest hint of this fatal secret to escape her lips.

"I promise, mother," replied Miss Norman.
"Whatever may betide,—nothing,—no earthly consideration, no prayer.—no entreaty.—must wring the confession from your

"So far, I solemnly engage myself," replied Miss Norman.

"But from the alteration of my manner, Walter will suspect that something is amiss. Exercise what care I may, I shall betray myself. I cannot be with him as I have been! My grief, — my consciousness, — will suggest inevitable changes. Every action of mine will be an avowal. Oh, mother! if you do not wish Walter to suspect the truth, take me hence,-part us,—or the first half-hour we pass together will show him that a fatal secret is tormenting my mind!

Lady Norman gazed with pity upon the agitated girl. "It is not to me, whose life has been embittered by duplicity, that you need enlarge upon the difficulties of your task," she replied. "I know all you will have to suffer. But, setting your mother's welfare out of view, I solemnly entrust to your keeping the memory of your father, and the peace and pros-

perity of Walter."

Then hastening from the room, she left her victim to ponder upon these things. It would require time and reflection to subdue the agitated soul of her daughter. Solitude and silence must prepare her for her first interview with Sir $\mathbf{Walter}.$

Already Matilda was beginning to tax herself with the perpetration of a new fault. She felt that, wrong as had been her silence, more culpable still was the confession which terror and excitement had extorted from her lips. She had lost the respect of her child. She had embittered the innocent life of Constance, only to plunge her into new dangers.

"A fatality is upon me," cried she, in her hour of solitary self-reproach. "From the first moment to the last, every step I have taken in this iniquitous business has plunged me into deeper misery. Having once set foot in the crooked path, it

became impossible to regain the ways of truth.'

Her compunction increased when, having exerted herself to rise, Constance joined her in the drawing-room. Miss Norman's cheek was ghastly, and her manner so bewildered, that her mother was confirmed in her belief that, in half an hour, Sir Walter would discover some fatal mystery to be oppressing the mind of his sister. Hoping that change of scene might be beneficial, Lady Norman proposed a drive, and laboured in the course of their airing to promote desultory conversation. But it would not do. Despair was upon the young girl's mind, as if the remains of one tenderly beloved were constantly extended

before her eyes.

All holy trusts, all earthly affections, seemed crumbling from her grasp. All that her life had been spent in loving and respecting was no longer to be respected, no longer to be loved. Her mother had for years been occupied in deceiving the world and her. Little as she knew of the world, Constance felt that the false position in which she stood was unprecedented; at variance with the spirit of the times and the march of human events. She had been singled out for sorrow, for probation, perhaps for atonement. It was in vain she tried to rally her spirits to reply to Lady Norman's common-place observations upon the road and the weather. "Do not talk to me, mother!" burst at length irrepressibly from her lips, "I cannot yet recover from this dreadful blow! Leave me-leave me to myself!"

Already Lady Norman discovered that her rash effort to retain the affections and guard the welfare of her child, was to be the source of deeper alienation between them. She had rescued Constance from the familiarities of Sir Walter Norman. She had consigned her to the clinging curse of gloomy and distract-

ing thoughts.
"To-morrow perhaps he may be here," faltered Miss Norman, when she took leave at night of her mother. "God keep him away! Hourly as I used formerly to pray for his return, do I now pray for his absence. I must have time to prepare myself

for the meeting."

And "time" Sir Walter seemed well inclined to accord. The appointed week was prolonged to a fortnight. Yet he neither came nor wrote. If the prognostications of the Tuxwell servants should prove true? If Walter should be attaching himself-nay, engaging himself to Lady Sophia Farleigh? If he should come home only to announce that he was about to bring among them a bride, a wife, a being to engross for the future his whole fondness and regard. If, as her brother, he

had done this, Constance would have been consoled by the reflection that nature's ties are never to be cast aside; that even with a husband and father, a sister's claims are valid. But this illusion was gone for ever. Her rights were extinguished; her attachment was a mockery. If Walter should marry, her mother would doubtless remove from Selwood, and they must learn to visit that beloved home as strangers, and look upon that beloved being as the property of another.

At length a letter arrived in his handwriting, bearing the London post-mark. It was addressed to Constance; but Constance had not courage to open it. She wept in silence while her mother read aloud Sir Walter's easy, frank, affectionate account of his proceedings in town; the attendance at Lincoln's Inn, exacted of him by Avesford; and the intimacy he was forming, for his own pleasure, with his relations the Morn-

ingtons.

"Since meeting them at dinner at the Farleighs," he wrote, "nothing can exceed the attentions I have received from Lady Moraington. I do not cite our fine-lady cousin as the most faultless of human beings; but, considered as a woman of the world, she is agreeable and well-bred, and has taken infinite pains for my amusement. At her suggestion, I have engaged a house for the season in Park Lane; and leave it to your eloquence to prepare my mother for listening to my arguments in favour of your sharing it with me after Easter, as soon as the ceremonies of attaining my majority have received honour due at Selwood Manor. Avesford promises that, in a few days, he will relinquieh all further claim on my time; when I shall have the happiness of telling you, as I daily assure myself, how truly I am both yours and my mother's most attached and faithful

"He may be here perhaps to-morrow!" was Constance's

only remark upon the letter.

"He has entangled himself in an intimacy with his greatest enemies!" was Lady Norman's further-sighted rejoinder. But at that moment their attention was claimed by an invitation from the Redelys, who were in the habit of assembling the neighbourhood on occasion of a fair held from time immenorial upon Avonwell Green, enlivened by rustic sports and popular diversions. In a remote county, any pretext serves for bringing country neighbours together; and the Normans, Farleighs, Skaremidges, and a few others, were annually to be found among the gay visitors of the Mid-Lent fair.

"You will of course send an excuse?" said Miss Norman, who in her earlier days had been accustomed to look forward

with gles to the humble fête.

"What protext have we for an excuse?" inquired her

mother, justly considering that Constance would be less embarrassed by Sir Walter's presence in a numerous company. "Walter may choose to attend a meeting to which so many boyish reminiscences are attached; and it will be thought

strange if, for the first time, we absent ourselves.'

A note of acceptance was accordingly despatched, intimating that Sir Walter was not yet returned from town, but would probably be at Selwood in time to accompany Lady and Miss Norman to pass the day at the Forges. Constance made no further remonstrance. She cared little now whither she went, or by whom her cares were noted. Her attention was absorbed in watching for the unusual stir in the house that might at any

moment announce the return of the absent master.

Yet, after all this caution, Sir Walter's arrival was a surprise to The mildness of the weather had tempted Lady Norman and her daughter into the park, so far as a little glen dotted with thoras, among which were usually to be found the first violets blown at Selwood; and every former spring, Constance, full of hope and happiness, had been on the spot sooner than the violets, listening to the linnets singing on the bare sprays of the old thorn-trees, as if they too were watching for the upspringing of the early flowers. But Constance took no further heed of the weather or the season. On this her first visit to the glen, she found it sheeted with white and purple violets, and fragrant with their pure and transient perfume.

On arriving at the spot, and noting the profusion of its tassels of pale primroses, with the green sheaths of the orchis starting up under the rugged old thorns, Constance did not stoop as usual to present one of the first spring-flowers to her mother. She looked listlessly round, as if wondering why so much beauty should be lavished in vain; and was about to propose ruturning homewards, when a murmur of voices was heard upon the air, and in a moment Sir Walter and a stranger were seen approaching them. Constance and her mother were fortunately still standing in the hollow of the glen, the former imagpable of stirring to meet the new-comers. But Sir Walter

hurried towards them in advance of his companion.

"I have brought my cousin, Captain Norman, to pay you a visit, mother," eried he, seizing the hand of Lady Norman. "How have you been? I am afraid you have thought me dilatory; but I assure you it was impossible to come before. Captain Norman! my mother and sister."

And while Lord Mornington's son and heir was performing his ceremonious salutations, Sir Walter threw his arms round the waist of Constance, and, pressing her to his bosom, imprinted

an affectionate kiss upon her lips.

"Don't scold me for having delayed so long in town!" oried he, attributing her recoil to displeasure. "I assure you, my dear girl, I would gladly have come last week, could Avesford have released me. But, darling Constance, how pale you are looking! Are you ill? What has been the matter?"
"I am not very well," faltered Miss Norman, her eyes dim

with tears, and scarcely able to sustain herself. "This is the first time I have been out for many days; and we were on the point of returning to the house."

Without another word of inquiry, Sir Walter drew her arm within his own; and supporting her whole weight upon it, assisted her up the steep ascent. He did not so much as look round to ascertain how Lady Norman was getting on with her unexpected guest, or whether her inquiries after Lord and Lady Mornington had brought them into a train of conversation.

"My dear sister, how weak you are—how nervous!" said he, in cordial tones of affection, at once welcome and painful to the ear of his companion. "Have you had any advice, Constance? Were you ever before subject to these attacks? Why did not my mother write to me? Had I known that you were indisposed, not all the guardians in the world, nor all the lawyers in Westminster Hall, should have detained me in London. Lean on me, Constance. You breathe so short, dearest, that I almost fear you have ventured too far from home. Have you been suffering from cold? Is your chest delicate? Let me pin your shawl closer over your chest."

Nearly as incoherent as Walter's interrogations, were the replies of poor Constance. She said that she was recovering from a feverish attack,—that she was better now,—that she should soon be well,—quite herself again. But as she uttered this promise, tears dropped from her eyes. She could scarcely support the excess of kindness with which the unfortunate

Walter was greeting his alienated sister.

"Had I dreamed of your indisposition, I would not of course have brought down Norman with me," said he, as they proceeded together slowly towards the house. "But the Morningtons have been so civil to me in town, and are so anxious to be on the best terms with us and to offer you every protection on your introduction into society, that when Captain Norman mentioned one day at dinner his desire to see Selwood Manor, I could not refuse myself the pleasure of introducing him to his venerable ancestors and living relations. Between ourselves," continued Sir Walter, lowering his voice, "Norman is a desperate fine gentleman, and disagreeable enough to those who do not take him in the right way. But he is by no means such an ass as he pretends to be."

"You do not give a very favourable picture of him," said

Constance, trying to rally her spirits.

"I mean to secure myself against two evils, by letting you into the secret. I don't want you to fall in love with him; and I don't want you to fall out with him."

"I promise you to do neither," replied Constance, gradually

cheered by the sound of Sir Walter's gladsome voice. "But what are we to do with your fine gentleman? To-morrow,

mamma has promised to spend the day and dine at the Forges."
"Why not?" cried young Norman. "What a refreshing novelty for a man who has lived enshrined, like a pagod, in the inner sanctuary of the temple of exclusivism! Norman has never heard people talk above their breath; unless his colonel, giving the word of command; or seen young ladies move a muscle of their sweet countenances, except an occasional glance of horror at some tiger presented to them as a partner. Old Redely, with his slaps on the back, and an appetite that could 'drink up eisel, eat a crocodile,' will appear to him a monster worth visiting the prairies to behold. As to your pretty, prattling Amy, with what her mamma characteristically calls 'her cherry-clack always a-going,' he will conclude her to be wound up every morning for exhibition, like Bautte's enamel conjurers.

"You will venture then to include your friend in the party?"

demanded Miss Norman.

"Certainly. But call him not friend, Hal, an' thou lovest me! It is not every cousin one wishes to call a friend. You and I, dearest, are friends as completely as though we were not brother and sister. But had Amy Redely been my twin-born, I could never have made a friend of her! —"

Constance replied by an involuntary pressure of the arm on which she was leaning. But the movement was one of forgetfinlness, or rather of reminiscence. Next moment, the impulse was repeated and atomed by a crimson blush. And precisely when this accusing testimony was mantling on her cheek, did Lady Norman and their visitor come up with them, as they entered together the swing-gate of the lawn.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Du clinquant,—des graces,—une nuance d'esprit sur un grand fond d'arro-gance;—telle est l'essence du fat de nos jours.—Tableau de Paris.

"THAT worthy with the peaked beard, who stands opposite watching you from his frame, as if expecting you to ask him to take wine with you, has the honour, Norman, to be your ancestor and namesake," said Sir Walter to Captain Norman, at the close of a sociable family-dinner in the Selwood eatingroom; the key-stones of whose venerable oaken ceiling were carved with the family crest, and the massive old plate of whose sideboard was profusely wrought with the same device.
"Allow me to present to you Sir Giles Norman, Knight, master of the revels to Harry the Eighth; whose effigy yonder, according to the showing of half a dozen county histories, is an original by Holbein; according to my poor judgment, a miserable copy."

"I am no judge of pictures," replied the gentle captain, whose alias of the "Spring-chicken" was current throughout the three regiments of guards. "At the Grove, which is a mere citizen's box, we have only a few hunting sketches, and Gilray's caricatures. But were I to possess a gallery, I should prefer having it filled with copies. One has some chance of keeping copies in the family; whereas the chances are ten to one in favour of Raphaels or Claudes finding their way to Phillips's or Christie's in the course of half a dozen generations. Now-a-days, people are wise enough to look upon their pictures and timber, like their exchequer bills, as a tangible invest-

ment."

The tone and phraseology of Captain Norman were so new to Constance and her mother, that though he paused for a reply,

neither of them ventured on a remark.

"And yet," said Sir Walter, "one cannot help admiring the almost Roman feeling which inspires so many of the half-ruined Italian nobles, to preserve the treasures of art in their mildewed marble palaces, while they subsist in frugal self-denial

upon lentil porridge and muddy wine."
"There is nothing I can help more easily!" lisped the captain, sipping his claret. "I plead guilty to a total want of sympathy in such heroical madness, or Roman magnanimity, or whatever you and the tragedy-makers are pleased to call it. These high-minded high-mightinesses would lead a happier life by selling the chef-d'œuvres they cannot afford to keep to

the nobles of our nation boutiquière, who can; and thus be enabled to find themselves in food and fuel. Personal comfort is a pleasanter companion for one's threescore years and ten. than a whole cohort of fine statues or fine sentiments."

"I am really shocked to find you so degenerate a Norman," said Sir Walter, amused by his kinsman's affectation. "My conscience will compel me to marry and cut off the entail, to prevent your sending the famous Selwood Titian to the auction

mart, the first time the four aces are against you.

At this menace, the captain smiled what was, in fact, his customary fastidious smile; which Lady Norman interpreted into a most significant sneer.

"The family tree, you know, has only two acorns left upon it," continued the unreserved Walter: "Constance, of course,

counting for nothing, as an unprofitable branch."
"You forget, my dear sir, my Trieste uncle's semi-Italian brood; to say nothing of my Yankee uncle's seven goodly sons, who are selling nails and treacle, in stores on the banks of the Mississippi," replied the Spring-chicken languidly. you to vanish from the face of the earth, there is every prospect of legitimate heirs to Selwood for centuries to come!"

And the captain again smiled what appeared to Lady Nor-

man a malignant sneer.

"Of the Trieste Normans, we know nothing," resumed the Spring-chicken after a pause. "My mother is the last woman in the world to keep up family connections. It may be a proof of tact in new people to look after the rooting and shooting of their offsets, to establish a name. But it is a mighty inconvenient thing for people of a certain standing. In ancient houses, as in old trees, the branches are apt to decay at the extremities. It is only among very great people one ever hears such a word as poor relations.

"You have not that excuse for disowning our Italian and American cousins," said Walter; "for I understand they are immensely wealthy."

"Are they? I know nothing at all about them," replied the Spring-chicken. "I consider it a serious misfortune to belong to what is called a good family, with a genealogy extant; or (like a haberdasher's stock-book,) a peerage, baronetage, or gentryage, to balance the sum total of one's kindred, and entitle uncles and aunts, whose existence one might otherwise ignore, to inflict impertinent advice. It is owing to the family pride of an idiotic old Lady Audley, whom, but for one of these family catalogues, my father would forget was his sister, that I was not made partner in an ale-brewery, instead of an ensign in the guards. The lucky dog who took my place is realizing ten thousand a year and keeps hunters at Melton while I have ten thousand pence and a hack. Had I been a Smith, Brown, Green, White, or Thompson, instead of a Norman of Selwood, I had by this time been a rogue in grain and a happy man !-- Who knows? Perhaps I might have risen to be an alderman!

Unable to distinguish between the jest and earnest of her superfine cousin, Constance represented to her mother, on repairing to the drawing-room, the danger of hazarding his

company at the Forges the following day.

"I have already sent off a messenger with a request for permission," replied Lady Norman, not sorry to find her daughter's attention engrossed by the absurdities of her cousin. "And you are mistaken in supposing that the Redelys will take offence at his impertinence. Amy and her mother will delight in the acquaintance of one who to them will appear the type of London fashion."

"But why not send an excuse for the whole party?" inquired Sir Walter, on the arrival of an answer from the Forges written with blue ink on embossed paper, and sealed with pea-"Constance is scarcely strong enough for the green wax. exertion, are you, darling? Constance would be much better at home."

"Impossible, now, to excuse ourselves," said Lady Norman coldly. "The Redelys are neighbourly people, who would take

our absence to heart.

"My sister, at least, need not be fagged to death to please them," cried Sir Walter. "You, my dear mother, and Norman, might drive over together; and I will join you at dinner, if Constance should not like to be left here quite alone.

"Indeed, I am well enough to accompany mamma," faltered Miss Norman, with glowing cheeks, aware how little this arrangement would please her mother. "I promise myself much pleasure in doing the honours of Avonwell Fair to

Captain Norman."

This remark, addressed in deprecation to her mother, was received with a gratified bow by the guardsman; who, unused to bestow much attention on girls, had hitherto scarcely deigned a glance at his country consin. He now looked gratefully towards her; and admitted that she was as pretty as discriminating. Her compliment lent him eyes to discover the dazzling fairness of her complexion, and Madonna-like expression of her countenance. "With a little fashioning," mused the Springchicken, "she might pass muster in London. That head and those curls would produce a sensation in a ground-tier opera box."

Faithless to his London principles, he forthwith took a chair beside her to determine whether the accomplishments of her mind corresponded with the beauties of her person; and forthwith began asking her opinion of French novels, of which she had never even heard the name; and musical composers, whose

celebrity had scarcely yet passed the channel.

"My mother will be charmed to make you acquainted with them," said he, after an indulgent smile at her confession of ignorance. "She is as much gratified as myself to learn that you are about to pass the season in town."

Miss Norman, a little surprised, assured him that he was

mistaken.

"I thought I understood from Lady Mornington that you had engaged Lady Margaret's house in Park Lane?" said Captain Norman, turning towards Sir Walter.

for six months; and I trust we shall all be settled there by the middle of May," he replied, looking up from a letter he was

reading

"Not all. You must really excuse me, Walter," said Lady Norman. "I am not desirous that Constance should make her

appearance in the London world."

possibility of moving?" interposed Captain Norman, as if really asking for information. "WHERE do you intend Miss Norman to live? With whom? For what?"

"With her family; and, I trust, to ensure happiness to herself and them," replied Lady Norman, in a more subdued voice.
"But my dear mother I engaged this house solely with a

"But, my dear mother, I engaged this house solely with a view to your pleasure and my sister's advantage," argued Walter, vexed at so strange a resolution on the part of Lady Norman.

"It is not three months since you declared your intention of remaining at Selwood till the grouse-season," replied Lady

Norman coldly.

"But I had not then learned from Lady Mornington, Lady Farleigh, and others of our friends, the necessity for my sister being presented, in order to appear in the world with the distinction becoming her position in life," said Walter stoutly. "Nothing but my views for Constance would have determined me to pass a season in London previous to taking my seat in Parliament."

"Thanks for your care of your sister's welfare," replied Lady Norman, almost ungraciously. "I hope I am not likely to neglect it. But I have no intention of taking her to town."

Unwilling to startle their guest by a family dispute (the first he had ever been disposed to attempt with his mother), Sir Walter deferred to a more convenient season the arguments he

intended to offer in favour of his plans.

Next day, he attempted to visit Constance in her dressing-room, before breakfast, to exact a promise of co-operation in his attempts. But the door was closed against him; and the maid answered his knock with information that Miss Norman would meet him presently in the breakfast-room. It was impossible to obtain a moment of private interview, for immediately after breakfast they set out for the Forges.

"Take your leave of trees and vegetation, Captain Norman," said Constance, as the barouche wound along a lane, the sloping banks of which were clothed with plantations, in which the varied budding of the underwood, red dogwood rods, and green shoots of the larch trees, almost vied with the brightness of summer foliage. "This shelving lane, with its wild hyacinths and lilies of the valley, is the last pleasant spot between Selwood and Avonwell. A step beyond it, and you will discover the influence of the Forges. See! The road is already mended with soorise. Half a mile further, and the evil spell has done

its worst."

According to her intimation, the stranger perceived the trees gradually diminish into bushes and the dwarfed bushes finally disappear. Then followed sickly pastures, tainted by a calcined atmosphere; and next (the Forges being that day at rest in honour of the fair, and the sky consequently pure from its usual clouds of smoke and vapour,) they descried, on the top of a naked hill, the soil of which looked as if extracted from the crater of Vesuvius, the huge square family mansion of Mr. Redely, of dingy red picked out with white; covered with tall, slender, irregular chimneys, like a brick kiln run to seed. Around it neither tree nor shrub was visible. Had a swarm of locusts passed over the land, it could not have been more completely denuded. Some attempt had been made to coax a few laurels into growth, in the fine grey dust and ashes surrounding the paved court. But the laurels knew better. The domain of the Fire King is probably a cold and humid retreat, compared with the soorched wilderness called Avonwell House by the Redelys, and the Forges by every one else in the county.

"What an Avernus!" cried the captain, as, winding round the knoll on which the house was perched, they overlooked on the declivity below, the range of furnaces usually glowing with flame, but now exhibiting only their blackened sides and iron chimneys. "Were I master of Selwood, I would not allow such a disfigurement to exist within five miles of me. I would

buy the fellow out!"

"I fear he is quite as well able to dispose of me. And as I happen to have two uncles who consider this spot the only interesting feature in the neighbourhood," observed Sir Walter, "one of them being proprietor of a manufactory twice as unsightly as this, the objection would come with an ill grace."

"But the factory to which you allude," said the Springchicken, "is probably situated at Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, or some other city of abominations. There are and ought to be condemned spots set apart for these disgraces. People have no right to go about defiling the face of respectable counties, and ruining the exquisite scenery of Derbyshire or Worcestershire, by furnaces and engine-chimneys."

"When first I came to Selwood, instead of the Forges at Avonwell, there was only a trace that something of the kind had formerly existed," observed Lady Norman. "It was a great source of regret to us when, on our return from the continent, we found a favourite spot thus miserably altered."

"That must be one and twenty years ago," said Captain Norman, after a moment's reflection. "How long did you

remain abroad after the birth of Sir Walter?"

"About two years," replied Lady Norman, her cheeks flushing crimson at the inquiry.
"Miss Norman, then, was born in England?" he persisted.

"Yes, in England." "At Selwood Manor?"

"Since you are curious on the subject," said Lady Norman, hastily, not knowing whether to resent his pertinacity, or turn it into a jest, "Lady Mornington is best able to satisfy you. She was in London at the time, and visited Constance in her cradle."

"But she did not visit Sir Walter while lying in his!" said Captain Norman, turning sharply round with a look in which Lady Norman's conscience read a thousand accusations, and which caused the blood to recede from the face of Miss Norman.

"That was very uncivil of her; a great disrespect to the heir of Selwood!" oried Sir Walter, laughing; wholly free from the embarrassment evinced by his mother and sister. "For, if I remember, Lord and Lady Mornington informed me they were in Paris the whole time of my poor father's sojourn there.

"Not the whole time," observed Captain Norman. will find that they quitted France before the heir of Selwood

made his appearance.

The expression, though by no means unusual, seemed to

convey a particular meaning to the ear of Lady Norman.

"Ay, I remember. I was born during the Hundred Days, when English, Russ, and Pruss, were trembling under the twinkling of poor Nap's expiring star. My father and mother were the only persons, I have heard, who stayed to face the enemy."

"Not quite!" replied Norman, gravely. "There were still a few fellow-countrymen on the spot, to watch over so momentous an event as the arrival of the heir of the Normans!"

Fortunately for Lady Norman, the carriage having at that moment reached the tumult of the fair, with its tin trumpets, wooden rattles, drums, fifes, men, women, and children, the four spirited horses could with difficulty be held in by the coachman; and the grimy population of the manufacturing district not recognizing the carriage, immediately raised a cry of "shame," and put themselves in postures of defence.

"Make your fellow push on through the midst of them!"

said Captain Norman with a languid glance over the heads of a mob which, even in the only holiday of their year, retained their claim to the title of the great unwashed "Bid him whip his horses over a few of them, to teach them better manners!"

Happily for the tender bones of the Spring-chicken, his counsels were unheard by the dingy tribe agitating themselves

round the carriage.

"Go gently, Thomas!" was Sir Walter's counter-order to the coachman. "At the top of the green, we will get out; then take the carriage round the back way to Mr. Redely's, without returning hither. Had I known the road was likely to be so crowded, my good friends, we would not have attempted to make our way."

A loud huzza hailed the delivery of this conciliatory address; extorted by the pale face and agitated demeanour of Constance, which Sir Walter attributed to the threatening aspect of the

mob.

"Long life to Sir Walter Norman, and the old House of Selwood!" cried a few of the foremost malcontents, who had been examining the armorial bearings on the traces they were preparing to cut. And while the people shouted, and the horses gave renewed signs of disapprobation, Captain Norman secretly commented upon the sneaking spirit of Sir Walter, who had neglected so glorious an opportunity of trampling down half-a-dozen filthy mechanics presuming to dispute his title to the crown of the causeway. It was not a pupil of the Mornington school who was likely to have patience with such pitiful subservience, such cringing to the sovereignty of the people.

"How pale and nervous you both look!" oried Mrs. Redely, as she welcomed Constance and her mother to the gay marquee appropriated to her party in the meadow devoted, by permission of her husband, to the sports of the day. "I suppose you've been frighted with those spirity horses? Will you take anything? A glass of sherry, or old Indy Madeira? Do! Well, if you won't, the foot-races had better begin. The people have put them off half an hour for us. The Skaremidges came early; and so did the Smiths and Greens. But where's Amy? Amy, my dear! Here's Miss Norman and her ladyship, and Sir Walter and the captain. Set seats in front of the marquee."

And the fair Amy came curtesying forward like a country

actress, over-dressed and over-civil.

"Is that young lady about to enhance the sports of the day by favouring us with a performance on the rope?" whispered Captain Norman.

"Why do you inquire?" replied Miss Norman gravely, suspecting, and with truth, that Amy's finery was intended for

the captivation of Sir Walter.

"Because she is so much smarter than a lady ought to be,

beyond the boundary of Hyde Park Corner. There is something meretricious in gaudy raiment among green trees and

hawthorn edges."

"But as we have no green trees just now, and our hawthorn hedges are not in leaf, Miss Redely's gay dress serves to animate the scene," said Constance, glancing at her own simple mourning habit. "Besides, neither Amy nor I are ever likely to enter the boundary of Hyde Park Corner. Such dissipations as fairs and races form the extent of our opportunities for being fine."

"For pity's sake do not class yourself with such a person," cried the captain. "With respect to London, rely upon mine and Sir Walter's influence to secure your season in town. My mother shall write to Lady Norman. All shall be settled to

your satisfaction.

"Believe me, I have not the slightest inclination to quit Selwood," replied Constance, feeling it necessary to uphold her mother's determination.

"Walter, my good fellow! Come and listen to Miss Norman's protest against London," cried the captain, seizing his cousin's arm, and tearing him away from the smiles of the fair Amy.

"Do you imagine that I condescend to consult the rebellious little puss?" cried Sir Walter. "Who gave you leave, Constance, child, to have an opinion of your own? I shall dispose of you as I please. Till lawfully married, you are as much my goods and chattels, as the chairs, tables, and joint-stools of Selwood Manor."

"Miss Norman, why do you allow him to talk so?" cried Amy, joining in the conversation. "If I had a brother, he

should do nothing but what pleased and suited me."

"Walter never does anything but what pleases and suits me," burst involuntarily from the lips of Constance.
"I declare you quite spoil him. Lady Norman, here is Miss Norman assuring Sir Walter that he is all perfection; and if she goes on flattering him at that rate, I'm sure I congratulate his wife."

Lady Norman looked grave and displeased. Taking the arm of her blushing daughter, she led her way towards old Lady Skaremidge. But as Captain Norman was still within hearing, she limited her reproof to-"There is nothing more ill-bred than for families to group together in mixed company, as if no

other person present were worth associating with."

Poor Constance proved her susceptibility to the reproach, by devoting herself throughout the remainder of the morning to the Skaremidges, and their less interesting country neighbours. She saw no more of Sir Walter. Sir Robert Skaremidge, old Redely, and an elderly Smith and Thompson or two, hurried him off, according to country-neighbourhood custom, to hold their private petty sessions for deciding upon the malpractices of the

public petty sessions, concerning grievances, small tithes, tolls,

trusts, turnpikemen, and other minute displeasures.

Lady Norman, meanwhile, passed a miserable morning. She was oftener entertained with panegyries of Sir Walter than with any other topic. Her country neighbours fancied themselves sympathizing in the pride of the mother of an only son, by enlarging on his perfections. The Skaremidges had their tale to tell of his popularity in Germany. Their dear Lionel's letters were full of the regrets excited by his speedy departure from Munich, and the admiration which, during his brief sojourn, he had called forth.

Constance looked piteously towards her mother, to remind her that it was no fault of hers these praises were heaped upon Walter; and during the ensuing hour, spent in pretending to be amused by the grotesqueness and humour of the country sports, they had to undergo the congratulations and compliments of every acquaintance present, upon his return in such good looks and charming spirits.

For Sir Walter, having at length extricated himself from the coils of that many-headed hydra, a knot of pottering countryneighbours, was now the life of the fair. He did not choose to remain a fastidious spectator, lest the people should fancy them-While Captain Norman, selves stared at like wild beasts. leaning over Constance, fixed his eye-glass upon their pastimes, Walter was among them, giving prizes to be run for,—purses to be wrestled for,—and dispensing fairings with a liberal hand to the full-blown belles of the fair. An offering of some kind or other had been already made to every lady belonging to Mrs. Redely's party; but the only object of any value to be found at Avonwell,—a work-box richly mounted,—was presented to Constance. Every one applauded. Every one agreed that, in these times, young men are sad brutes to their sisters; and assured Lady Norman that in this, as in all else, her son

was a pattern.
"I do not, however, approve of my friend Walter's manners!" whispered the captain to Miss Norman. "There is a fitness of things even in buying gingerbread at a fair. He is behaving to-day in a manner highly commendable at an election; but his deportment is too candidatorial for ordinary occasions. As a member, it is right to court popularity; it is infra dig. to seek it as a man. All this distribution of ginger-

bread is trivial and out of place."

In spite of her griefs, Constance found it impossible to resist the gravity with which this oracular speech was delivered; and Amy, imagining like most ill-bred people that others were as ill-mannered as herself, immediately concluded that Miss Norman's merriment was excited by something amiss in the arrangements of the day.

It would have been sinful, however, to find fault with the

cordial hospitality of the Redelys. As soon as the fair began to grow riotous, the party crossed the meadows towards the Solfatara of Avonwell House; and the diversions of the day concluded with a dinner which might have done honour to a more distinguished establishment. The Spring-chicken was amazed to perceive that the savages, upon whose desert he was accidentally wrecked, participated in those luxuries and improvements of the table which he had conceived to be the privilege of the elect.

"How one lives to see one's idols overthrown!" said he. "Among the few objects remaining to my veneration was a wellappointed dinner-table. And here is an old Worcestershire Cyclop, who drops his H's and wears leather gaiters, with a service nearly as good as my father's. It is enough to disgust one with human life!"

To avoid incurring anew the reprehensions of Lady Norman, Constance rejoiced that the ready flow of flippancy saved her all necessity for her cousin's reply; and Lady Mornington's son concluded that the rustic beauty had fallen a victim to his wit. He had no objection. Constance was the prettiest girl he had transfixed for some time past. She was well born, for she was his kith and kin; and in possession of a fortune of thirty thousand pounds, with good expectations. Before they rose from table, the Spring-chicken admitted to himself that were it possible for a man of his exclusive position in society to perpetrate matrimony, he might almost permit himself to think a second time of his cousin.

CHAPTER XXXV

Oh, not my brother !- yet unsay-God! am I left alone on earth? BYRON.

WEARY as Constance soon became of Captain Norman's laborious trifling, she was not sorry to find his stay at Selwood Manor prolonged beyond the four or five days originally specified for the visit. So long as he was there, Lady Norman felt more at her ease. So long as he was there, Constance was at her ease also. With a third person interposed between herself and

Walter, she could enjoy his society as heretofore.

The weather was propitious for riding. Spring was budding in every hedge; and day after day, the little party set forth to display to the heir presumptive some favourite point of the scenery of Selwood. With the exception of Lady Norman, all were in high spirits. Sir Walter elate with the unmixed happiness of his position; his cousin with the dawning excitement of a passion which almost dispelled the artificiality of his habits and conversation; and Constance with the joy of sharing the society of a person tenderly beloved. Her mother alone looked forward with trembling towards the clouds suspended on the verge of their horizon!

"You had much better remain with us, my dear Norman, till our grand celebration at the end of the month," said Sir Walter to his cousin, one morning, as they returned from rabbit-shooting, followed at a distance by the keepers. "In ten days, comes Easter, when you will certainly not choose to be in town. My birthday falls in the week following."

"I have been a week here already, my dear fellow," said Captain Norman. "When I asked you to introduce me to Selwood, I did not intend to establish myself permanently under your roof-tree!"

"If you persist in returning to town on Thursday, I shall fancy you are afraid of trusting your toryism in the same house with Avesford; albeit, you hate my uncle as a radical, and

despise him as a roturier."

"On the contrary," replied Norman, with much magnanimity, "I should be gratified to make acquaintance with one of the most remarkable men of the day. I have heard wonders of Mr. Avesford from Lady Audley, who lives near him; and he was very civil and hospitable to little Quickset, of ours, when he was recruiting in his neighbourhood."

"Stay, then, and fulfil your good intention," persisted Sir Walter. "You will have plenty of time to perform quarantine before the commencement of the London season. And I promise you never to reveal in decent society that you rusticated more than a day or two with your country cousins.'

"Avesford is guardian to Miss Norman, I presume, as well as to yourself?" inquired the Spring-chicken, trying to look un-

concerned.

"Yes, to both of us; and a kinder or more conscientious, never existed," cried Sir Walter. "If you knew what pains he has taken to make me see things with my own eyes, and judge matters with my own judgment, instead of playing the Pasha with me; keeping down my selfish pride and encouraging only a proper consciousness of my position and its responsi-bilities. If ever I am worth more than this dockweed," cried he, whipping off the first green head that presented itself, "it will be thanks to Avesford!"

"Do us the justice to ascribe something to the influence of honourable ancestorship, or Newmarket goes for nothing!" remonstrated Captain Norman. "Bit, bridle, and spur, have done their part perhaps, but blood was the foundation of all!" And the diminutive captain, whose air and proportions were those of a well-bred bantam, drew up with an attempt to prove by outward and visible signs, that he was able to count quarterings with any prince of the empire. No one, accidentally viewing the two cousins, would have suspected that the puny captain was the legitimate heir of Selwood; Walter, an ignoble interloper.

Captain Norman's next topic was more to the taste of his companion. He began suddenly to enlarge upon the merits of

Miss Norman.

"Yet according to your theory," cried Sir Walter, "Con-

stance's pretensions ought not to stand on the same line with those of Lord Farleigh's daughters."
"You misapprehend me!" cried his cousin. "The Farleighs are nobodies. The Farleighs would not obtain admission into a German chapter. The first Lord Selsdon was a city knight of the time of James the First; when the Normans of Selwood Manor were almost in their decadence."

"And yet an earl with such an estate-

"My dear Sir Walter," interrupted the captain, "I know an earl, with twice the Selsdon rent-roll, whose grandfather was

an Irish soap-boiler."

"What then? Are not all honours bubbles?" cried Sir Walter, laughing heartily at his cousin's vehemence, while Captain Norman seized the opportunity of his jocularity to revert to his levely cousin.

"After all," said he, "perhaps Lady Norman is prudent in declining to take your sister to town. She would lose so lovely

a creature the first season; and an only daughter is not so

easily parted with."

"If my sister's marriage were the obstacle," rejoined Sir Walter, "my sister is in as much danger here as in town. Three months ago, she refused St. Aubyn."

"St. Aubyn?—and before she had seen any person likely to engage her affections!" cried Captain Norman. "Was she unable to appreciate the advantage of such a connexion, or in hopes of doing better?"

"Neither one nor the other," replied Sir Walter. "She did

not like Lord St. Aubyn.'

"Like him! Is a woman expected to like a marquis with

sixty thousand a year?"

"Certainly, if she consents to marry him," cried Sir Walter, somewhat nettled. "What inducement but inclination should tempt Constance to change her situation? She has only to name the whim that enters her head, and if in my power to gratify it, her brother is far more likely to secure it to her than her husband. My mother adores her as I do. From the moment I become my own master, I shall take care that my sister enjoys as much independence as is compatible with the customs of the world. She shall have her own servants,—her own horses. My mother has not worn jewels since her widowhood, so Constance is welcome to the family diamonds. There is nothing, in short, she could ask or order, which is not at her disposal."

disposal."
"You almost alarm me," said the Spring-chicken, in a half-embarrassed manner. "It is unnecessary, I suspect, to apprize you of the impression produced upon my feelings by Miss Norman. But how can I presume to offer her a share of my humble prospects, while she possesses a home and heart such as you

state to be at her command?"

"Were Constance disposed in your favour," replied Sir Walter, betraying, by an irrepressible start, his surprise at this sudden turn of the conversation, "your prospects, either as Lord Mornington's son, or eventual heir to my property, are such as she has no right to disregard. But as my sister's feelings towards you are purely those of a friend,—a relative——"

"You are not, I imagine, an unerring judge on such points," interrupted Captain Norman, with a fastidious smile. "At all events, it is only from Miss Norman's lips that I shall consider

the decree decisive."

"Do you empower me to ask her the question?" demanded

his cousin.

"Thank you.—It were rash to hazard my name, in her list of rejections, next to that of the Marquis of St. Aubyn. Besides, though Lord Mornington is as little apt as most men to interfere in the affairs of his wife or son, he might think it necessary to resent my having taken so strong a step without consulting

him.

"Lord Mornington, I should imagine, would scarcely object to Miss Norman of Selwood, as a daughter-in-law?" observed

Sir Walter, proudly.

"He might object to having a daughter-in law at all."

"Then why apply to me till you had obtained his sanction to your addresses? cried Walter, with increasing irritation. Did you fancy the honour would be too great for our fortitude if it burst upon us too suddenly?"

"I hoped you would give me such encouragement," replied Norman, with gentlemanly forbearance, "as might justify my applying for the consent of Lord Mornington. I hoped you would, at least, show so much courtesy as to say that you did

not object to me as a brother-in-law.'

"I have spoken hastily," oried Sir Walter, with his usual arm-hearted candour. "But the truth is, I cannot readily warm-hearted candour. reconcile myself to the prospects of any match for my sister. Constance is everything to me; and I have made up my mind never to marry so long as she remains single. Selwood would become a wilderness, were she taken from it to preside over a home of her own!"

"Yet it is an event that must occur," said Captain Norman,

coldly.

"Are there not thousands of examples, especially in Catholic

families, of women preferring a single life?

"Miss Norman is too good to devote herself to a vocation so unnatural as that of a lay nun," said the captain. "However, you have said enough to determine me to pause ere I open

negotiations with Lord Mornington."
"I,—my dear fellow?—What have I said?—Nothing, I hope, to cast any disparagement upon your pretensions?—You are at liberty to address my sister,—at liberty to repeat to her every

syllable I have uttered, -at liberty to-

"We are both of us getting a little warm," observed Captain Norman, affecting to recover his self-possession; "which is not surprising, considering the glowing nature of our subject. At all events, let it be dropped for the present. I return to London early to-morrow. When you hear from me again, I shall have learned whether my father will place me in a position entitling me to make formal proposals for the lovely Constance. By the way, had we not better discharge our guns before we approach too near the house?"

Sir Walter understood this as a peremptory dismissal of the question. His blood was boiling. He could scarcely command himself to behave with common civility to Captain Norman in

the space that intervened between them and the house.

"As I depart so soon, it would be but decent, I believe, to ride as far as Scarwell Park, and make my excuses for not

dining with your friend, Sir Robert Skaremidge, on Saturday?" said Captain Norman, perceiving, by the turret-clock of the offices, that two awkward hours were still to elapse previous to the ringing of the dressing-bell. But Sir Walter, though approving the proposal, he accompanying his cousin to the stables to order one of his best horses and his groom to be in attendance, said not a word of bearing him company.

No sooner had the discomfited visitor ridden off, than Sir

Walter, finding his mother engaged with the old maiden sister of the vicar of Selwood, put his head unceremoniously into the drawing-room and invited his sister to walk with

"Constance! I want to speak to you. I have something very particular to say to you," cried he, in so percentage a tone of voice that Lady Norman had not courage to interpose.

"Put on your hat and shawl, and come and walk with me in the shrubbery," said he, the moment the drawing-room door closed behind her; and in a few minutes Constance was proceeding on his arm along the yew-walk, scarcely able to keep pace with his precipitate movements.

"You said you wanted to speak to me," faltered Miss Norman, after some hesitation. "Has anything unpleasant oc-

curred?"-

"Nothing, of any consequence. I only wished, my dear Constance, to ask you a few questions important to your happiness

—important to mine."

An idea glanced into the mind of Miss Norman, that a suspicion of the fatal secret with which she had been recently entrusted might have reached Sir Walter. "Ask nothing," said she, "which I am not at liberty to disclose. Even you, Walter, have no right to exact from me a breach of promise."

"Of promise?" he repeated, unsuspicious of her error.
"Surely you cannot have already entangled yourself? Surely you cannot, previous to my return to England, have pledged

your word to

" Not previous to your return to England."

"And since, whom have you seen likely to engage your affections? Surely Norman cannot be justified in his hint of having made an impression on your feelings! I will not believe it! A prating, self-sufficient coxcomb!"

"We misunderstand each other, I fancy," said Constance, "Captain Norman is one of the last men on earth for whom I could entertain a partiality."

"I expected as much," cried Sir Walter, seizing his sister's hand, and shaking it as he would have done that of a young friend of his own age and sex. "And yet, that fellow's cool, deliberate way of asserting his hopes sufficed to put me out of temper. The fool is persuaded he has only to propose and be accepted, at a moment's notice, and after a week's acquaintance.

Why there is even less to commend in him than in Lord St. Aubyn. St. Aubyn knows nothing of the world, and may improve. Norman is unimprovable."

"Both are equally below my standard of merit," replied Constance, more gravely. "Nor is it likely I shall see it attained by mortal man. But I am too happy at home to wish to leave

"To own the truth," oried Sir Walter, "it would go to my heart, Constance, to part with you. You are only seventeen. You have at least four years before you, to form a wise and prudent choice. Secondary only to my mother, you are mistress here. Invite whom you wish; dismiss whom you please from our acquaintance. There is no sacrifice at which I would not secure the companionship of a dear and only sister, without which my existence becomes a blank."

Constance was deeply touched, but it was essential to regain her wonted composure; for Lady Norman, having at length got rid of her guest, was already advancing towards them, with

anxiety and suspicion in her looks.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Toi seul, triste martyre de ta sombre prudence, Toi seul ne connait pas la douce confiance !-En vain de ton secret tu te sens oppresser. Au sein de quelques amis oses-tu le verser? Des plus mortels poisons l'abeille fait son miel, Toi, du plus doux objet tu composes ton fiel.

DELILLE.

OFTEN did the unhappy mother, after suffering her anxieties to betray her into harshness towards her idolized child, retire to her room to indulge in solitary tears and atone by selfreproach the injustice of her conduct. Yet still, though often repentant, her fault was often renewed.

The announcement made at dinner by the Spring-chicken, of his intended departure, and a sudden resumption of his original flippancy, satisfied Lady Norman that he had proposed and been rejected. When again alone with her daughter, she had little difficulty in extracting the truth.

"And what right had Walter to take so much upon himself," she observed, "without consulting either of us?"

"My indifference towards Captain Norman was evident to the whole house. Walter, probably, did not wish to keep him in unnecessary suspense."

"But why dismiss him with a degree of precipitation and

discourtesy which has sent him off infuriated to London, and made the Morningtons our enemies for life? Walter Norman may live to repent having provoked so dangerous and potent an adversary.

"I trust not,-I earnestly trust not!" said Constance, turning pale. "It would be hard, indeed, if his care for my hap-

piness were to operate to his disadvantage."

No further reference was made to the subject. But the alteration of Lady Norman's manner could not have failed to attract the attention of Sir Walter, but that his time was devoted to the preparations and arrangements contingent on the attainment of his majority. A political dinner, too, was about to take place in a neighbouring county, of which his uncle, Cruttenden Maule, was one of the stewards, and at which the presence of Sir Walter Norman was solicited. Either through inadvertence or disinglination the letter of invitation remained unanswered; and Cruttenden, who had not visited Selwood Manor since his nephew's arrival in England, made his appearance to reprove, congratulate, and renew his solicita-tions. Though affectionately welcomed by Lady Norman and Constance, they could not but secretly rejoice that the inbreak of the thundering radical had not occurred during the visit of the Spring-chicken.

"Where's Walter?" cried he, after having hastily returned

their greeting. "Why didn't he answer our letter?

"What letter?"

"An invitation from the stewards of the Free Union."

"Walter is much engaged just now with his tenants and bailiffs," said Lady Norman. "I dare say it escaped his memory."

"It ought not to have escaped his memory!" cried Cruttenden, warmly. "I hope and trust, Matty, you're not trying to make a milksop of the lad?"

"If you mean by interference with his political opinions," replied Lady Norman, "you must be well aware, my dear brother, that I have submitted entirely to the will of Sir Richard Norman, by committing his son to the control and guidance of my brother-in-law, Avesford."

"Ay, left him to become a pitiful half-and-half,—neither fish, flesh, nor good red-herring," cried Crutt. "As if the misfortune of being a born Frenchman wasn't enough, without adding the disgrace of being a trimmer, a lukewarm, spiritless creatur',

without wit to be one thing or t'other !-

"But Walter is perfectly decided, uncle," interrupted Miss Norman. "I heard your friend, Mr. Redely, call him to task for having declared himself a moderate Whig; and announced at some public meeting his intention of standing on those principles at the next dissolution.'

"The devil he did?" cried Crutt, not allowing time to Lady

Norman to rebuke the interposition of her daughter. "Then tell Master Walter from me, that he must look sharp about him. If Redely were only to stand against him, he'd soon find that the Norman interest isn't what it was in this part of the country twenty year ago. Look at the strength that has started up. Look at Redely and the money turned at the Forges. Look at the new population betwixt this and Scarwell Park. The Normans have gone down twenty per cent.; and unless Walter should turn out something stancher than there's reason to hope, he may go and second Avesford's preaching in the House; and devil a thought the country will ever be the better or wiser for either of 'em!"

"No real friend of Sir Walter would desire to see him take a violent part in politics," observed Lady Norman. "It belongs

neither to his age nor position.

"Women call everything violent that goes beyond the humdrum opinions of their great-grandmothers; as the Sussex fishermen call it blowing a gale, when there's wind enough to put out a farthing rushlight. As to his position in life, old Crutt always swore you were just the woman to cram the lad's head with absurd notions of that kind. Avesford's twaddle distanced me with Walter, and now your twaddle is distancing Avesford. Between both, he will dwindle into a poor pitiful do-nothing, like the rest of 'em!"

The moment Sir Walter made his appearance, these charges were renewed. Even the frank, good-humoured vivacity of his nephew's welcome, could not subdue the spleen of the Birming-

ham Mirabeau.

"'Twon't do, my lad!" said Crutt. "All the cousin-comeover-me in the world isn't worth the plain ay or no which

explains whether a man's with one or against one!"

"Whether a member is with you or against you, perhaps," said Walter, laughing. "But surely a man may find a medium between as-sent and dis-sent; to express that he approves your good things, and eschews your evil ones? Now tell me truly, uncle! Did not that superannuated spirit of mischief, Tom Cruttenden, who still sits cowering over the hearth raking up coals of strife in the family, suggest that now or never was the time to snatch me like a brand out of the fire?"

"Never mind who suggested it. I am here now, and ask you a plain answer to a plain question. Do you consider vote by

ballot a final measure?"

"What do I consider, eh, Constance?" eried Sir Walter, turning to his sister, and affecting to parry by a jest an interrogatory which he felt that his uncle had no right to press in so peremptory a manner. "You know I have promised to have no political opinions but yours. What am I? Whig or Tory, Conservative or Destructive? I pause for a reply."

nephew did not choose to commit himself by a premature and gratuitous profession of political faith. But Lady Norman, whose mind was biassed by a ruling passion, took the sportive sally of the young baronet in a serious sense; and her reprehensions of his levity were so intemperate that, long before they were concluded, her brother was the first to propose to Walter

to adjourn to the park, and view the improvements.

"Matty, I see (like all the women that ever were born), is unwilling to part with an inch of authority without a struggle!" said Cruttenden, as he trudged along by his nephew's side to-wards the new pheasantry. "I saw by her letters that matters were not running smooth between you. The moment old Tom heard of her intention of quitting Selwood, 'Mark my words, Crutt,' says he, 'the young spark and the dowager have had a tussle, and she's retreating in time from the field, to save the shame of being packed off!"

"In Heaven's name, what can you mean?" cried Sir Walter, "There has not been the slightest misungreatly astonished. derstanding between my mother and myself. She is sometimes peevish with my sister; why, I can scarcely tell you, for Constance has the most angelic temper upon earth. But with me

she has been ever on the best of terms.

"Well, then, I suppose it is with a view to keeping so, that my sister has made up her mind to come and settle at Halsewell Lodge."
"You are growing more and more unintelligible!" cried Sir

Walter, in some agitation.

"Why, don't you recollect the shooting-box I built about ten years ago, which, when it was finished, old Crutt would never set foot in, 'cause he swore 'twas damp.'

"Yes, I remember Halsewell."

"I had tenants in the house till last summer. But they quitted at Michaelmas; and about Christmas time, Matty, seeing in the county paper an advertisement of Halsewell to be let or sold, wrote to me, making a bid. Of course, it wasn't a thing to be heard of, to let money pass betwixt brother and sister; and for a week or two we were on and about it, 'cause I would not hear of rent, nor she of living there without. All was to be kept such a grand secret, that there was no chance of a mutual friend bringing us to an understanding. But to make an end on't, I had a deed of gift drawn up, making over the place to Constance; and poor Matty had no right to refuse during the girl's minority. After all the words that had passed, the property wasn't valued at four thousand pounds; and surely a man, without chick or child belonging to him, has a right to expect his sister or niece will accept that much of him, eh?

"Yes—no! I was not thinking of the place!" cried young Norman, with considerable emotion. "Has Constance been

artful enough to conceal all this from me!"

"As far as I know, she is still in the dark. For some foolish reason or other, Matty has chosen to make a mystery of the business; even from the Avesfords; even from my niece. And though, of course, I'm glad enough for my own sake to have them come and settle in what I call my neighbourhood, I can understand that my sister may be inclined to keep her scheme snug, for fear of the opposition it was like to meet with from Constance. As to you, I thought you were at the bottom of all."

"Could you for a moment suppose me to be coinciding in a project which is to deprive me of the society of those who are nearest and dearest to me?" cried Sir Walter, with indignation.

"You really had no finger in the pie? Then please to recollect," added Cruttenden, "that what I have let out is in strictest confidence. Matty would never forgive me, if she

knew I had betrayed her secret."

"But in return, promise to remonstrate with her, my dear uncle, as of your own accord. You must represent the impropriety of removing my sister from Selwood; and the scandal it will create in the world, should it be supposed that my conduct towards my mother has been such as to compel her to fly from Selwood Manor. My affection for my family is unbounded. I have never intentionally given offence to either of them. But if I have accidentally erred, I am willing, for the peace of my own conscience, as well as to restore a good understanding between us, to humble myself by the most abject apologies. You must tell her all this——"

"My dear Walter, compose yourself!" cried his good-natured uncle, with much concern. "I'm sure I'm heartily sorry I said anything that vexes you. It's no fault of yours that Matty chooses to live independent; nor no news to you, I should think, that, give women their way so much as you will, they'll always find some pretext or another for flying off into their tantrums.

"But my mother is so reasonable, so amenable to argument! Were you even now to point out to her the consequences-

"She might take it into her head that I repented what she calls my generosity, and that I want to dissuade her from inhabiting Halsewell. Wait till Avesford (who had always the greatest influence with her) arrives from town."

"I cannot wait a day!" cried Sir Walter, gasping for breath.

"Then write, and get him to expostulate with her by letter."

"I must see Constance—I must consult Constance. Indeed you must permit me to entrust this matter to my sister. assure you, my dear uncle, her discretion may be relied on.

"So you seemed to think when you referred your choice of party to her," cried Cruttenden, laughing at his nephew's vehemence. "The discretion of a little mind of seventeen!"

"From her infancy she has been the companion of my mother. Perfect reliance is to be placed on Constance!

"I take her prudence upon your word. Matilda appears to me, just now, to be fretful and out of spirits; and it is not for me, to whom she has always been a kind, affectionate sister, to aggravate her anxieties."

Already, Maule had agreed to sleep at Selwood, and proceed on his way towards the union meeting, early on the morrow. But a dull constrained evening, spent with the disunited family, made him repent his resolution. The moment Lady Norman and her daughter retired for the night, Walter recommenced his inquiries. As yet, he had been unable to obtain even a momentary interview with Constance. But having received from Maule deliberate confirmation of all he had asserted in the morning, he fancied that a few minutes' conference with his sister would determine the real state of his mother's intentions.

"Constance can't be asleep yet," said his uncle. "Go up to her room, and talk the matter over with her. I will smoke a eigar while you are away. In this room, the nuisance is

allowed."

"You shall have your cigar," replied Norman, rising and opening a fresh case of Havannahs. "But I fear I shall not be admitted to my sister. It is contrary to my mother's rule for me to enter their rooms."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried Cruttenden, proceeding to light his cigar. "How long has Matty grown so prudish?" I'm sure she didn't learn the lesson at home. We boys used to run in and out of hers and Bessy's rooms, just as we pleased."
"Because you were boys. I think her regulation a good one;

but there can be surely no harm in breaking through it on an

especial occasion.

"To be sure not," cried Crutt, more intent on the delicious fumes of his cigar, than on weighing the proprieties of the case. "If I had not set in for a comfortable smoke, I'd go with you myself. Matty would scarcely find fault with my visiting their blue chamber. And now, be off with you, Walter; for I should like to hear the upshot of all these mysteries, before I sleep.

Miss Norman's apartment opened into the same corridor with that of her mother. But a small ante-chamber and dressingroom intervened between Lady Norman's bedroom and the gallery; so that, once retired, she was not likely to be disturbed by the opening of her daughter's door. Though sleepless on an uneasy pillow, not a murmur reached her ear of the discussion that now arose between Constance and her brother: the latter earnestly entreating, the former as earnestly declining, a few minutes' conversation. Miss Norman, attired in her dressing-gown, stood at the half-open door, entreating Sir Walter would retire, unwilling to grant a concession she was certain her mother would disapprove.

"My dear sister, I ask but for five minutes. I beseech you

let me in for five minutes. The matter is one that regards the happiness of our lives," cried Walter. And such was the despair painted in his countenance, that Miss Norman, dreading lest something connected with the secret of his birth might

have accidentally transpired, hesitated no longer.

"Lose no further time," said he, gently pushing open the door of the ante-room, and closing it behind him. "Cruttenden is waiting to hear the result of what I have to tell you." And Constance, conceiving Lady Norman's objections to be directed against unreserved communication between them in any time or place, renounced all further opposition, and took a seat beside Walter, who had thrown himself into a chair.

"Constance!" was his first scarcely articulate ejaculation.

Are you in this accursed plot against my peace?"
"I am in no plot, dearest Walter," said she. "All I said this morning I am ready to confirm. Whatever may transpire, I shall ever entertain for you the fond affection of a sister.

"Yet you are about to sanction a measure that will drive me from Selwood for ever! The moment Lady Norman reveals her secret to the family, I bid adieu to home—I bid adieu to country. Since she disdains to receive from me the love and duty of a son, I will fly from England, visit the country of my birth, and -

"Alas, alas! by what cruel accident has this fatal secret transpired!" cried Miss Norman, losing all self-possession.

"You knew it then, Constance. You knew it this morning, when I was pouring out my soul to you, yet disdained to enlighten me. It was by others I was to be apprized of the cruel truth!"

"God forbid that I should have been the first to pronounce a decree which, after so many years of affection, renders us strangers to each other!" cried Miss Norman, wildly.

Sir Walter gazed upon her in silent amazement. "Surely," she continued, tears now streaming down her cheeks, "since it was my father's will that you should assume the rights and title of his son, the choice which invested you with the empty gifts of fortune, entitled you also to my sisterly affection? Since my knowledge of this hateful, fatal secret. my attachment, dearest Walter, has rather augmented than diminished. Compassion seems to soften my heart with new tenderness towards you. I feel not only for the bitterness of the false position in which you have been placed, but for the privations awaiting you. For I know, Walter, I know as surely as if you had already said it, that the moment which revealed to you this cruel mystery, determined you to fling aside the fictitious honours imposed by others on your acceptance."

"How long have you known this, Constance, and from whom did you learn it?" gasped Sir Walter, upon whose bewildered

mind terrific light was now breaking.

"From my mother! She revealed all to me during your

absence in town."

"She told you that I was not her son?" demanded Sir Walter, growing paler and more haggard, while Constance replied by a mournful sign of assent. "But did she tell you who were my parents? Bereaved in one moment of all I hold dear on earth-my kinsmanship with her and you-has she bestowed nothing on me in return? Did she leave me none to love-none; none to love me?"

He paused. "She said that you were a foundling," murmured Constance, "born of foreign parents, and adopted at Paris by my father to become heir of Selwood."

"French parents!" murmured the unfortunate young man. "Such parents as could sell their child to be the innocent object of a fraud! Outcasts—perhaps beggars—bought to consent to their disgrace, and their son's undoing!"

Instinctively, Miss Norman approached her beloved Walter, and entwined her hands caressingly round his arm. His first movement was to unclasp them, and repel her advances. "You are no longer my sister," said he, "I must not presume to tender you the endearments of an equal!"

"As a brother, you are still beloved; as a brother, you will ever, ever be beloved!" exclaimed Constance, again clasping her hands together, yet almost overpowered by his harshness. "Do the years we have passed together plead nothing in my favour? You are my brother, Walter!—No longer the heir of

Selwood, but still, still my beloved brother!"
"Reflect on what you promise," cried he, throwing himself distractedly on the sofa, and drawing her towards him. "Think on how ignominious a wretch you may lavish your tenderness! The blood of robbers, swindlers, murderers, may be in my

veins; the blood of wretches who, having lost their honest name, ended by making a traffic of their child!" "Do not suppose it!" exclaimed Miss Norman, attempting to soothe, by the most affectionate gentleness, the frenzy of her companion. "There is nothing in your heart, your mind, your nature, but what is good and noble; noble with the nobility of the Almighty's own creation. When did you ever entertain a base intention, or a mean opinion? You are noble, dearest Walter. Something in my inmost soul assures me that you are come of gentle race.

Softened by her caresses, though still wild with perplexity and wonder, Walter passed his hand over his forehead, and tried to compose his bewildered senses sufficiently to determine what course was next to be pursued. But the effort only served

to render him more frantic.

"You have been sporting with my fortitude, Constance!" cried he, suddenly bursting into a convulsive laugh, as retrospective thoughts seemed for a moment to restore the stability of his former position. "Own that you have been trifling with me? Own that I have borne my trial well? But no!" cried he, smiting his brow with his clenched hands, as he obtained by a glance at Miss Norman's mournful countenance fatal confirmation of his misfortune. "It is all too true. I have no sister, no mother, no home, no country! What have I done to be thus miserably degraded?"

"Have pity on yourself and me," cried Miss Norman, throwing her arms around him. "Meet this reverse as becomes the character you have borne among us. In losing all else, do not forfeit our respect. Your altered circumstances can effect no shadow of change in our affection, unless by effacing the precious qualities which have rendered you so dear."

"Constance," faltered her agonized companion, folding her closely to his bosom, as if fearing that already she was about to be torn from him for ever. "You were the dearest blessing of my day of prosperity—of my adversity, be the consoling angel."

He could add no more. Lady Norman, in stern indignation, stood beside them. Roused from her pillow by the tones of the excited Walter, she had rushed into her daughter's room.

"Are we not a moment safe from these intrusions?" cried she. "Is not even my daughter's chamber sacred, when the whole family is retired to rest? Sir Walter! I have but a few more weeks to remain under your roof, and I entreat-nay, I command you-entreat you as a friend-command you as a mother—show some respect for the decencies of society.

"Madam," replied the young man, with stern gravity, time is over for such words to pass between us. Appeal to me no more as a son, but as a wretch whom your wilfulness has raised above his humble condition only to dash him to destruction. My existence has been marred by the caprices of others. Do not augment my degradation by the mockery of thus addressing me. I have no roof, no mother! I know all. You are still the Lady Norman whom I have idolized and venerated —I the miserable outcast on whom you have lavished such cruel kindness-

A shriek from Constance, whose eyes were fixed upon Lady Norman's ghastly face, suspended all further remonstrance on the lips of Walter.

"What is all this?" cried Cruttenden Maule, who, weary of waiting for his nephew, was come in search of him. "My niece in tears?-My sister-Walter, what means this dis-

turbance?"

"It means," cried the unfortunate Walter Norman, falling on his neck and sobbing aloud, "that I have lost all else, and that I am now losing my reason! Denounce me,—cast me forth as an impostor! I am not the son of Sir Richard Norman; I am not the rightful heir of Selwood!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Oh! mother,—yet no mother!

That night was spent in earnest conference between Walter and the brother of Lady Norman. Cruttenden Maule's personal recollections readily supplied corroboration of the facts imparted to Constance by her mother. He was now only surprised that suspicions on the subject had never before presented themselves to his mind.

sented themselves to his mind.
"I wish to heaven," cried Crutt, with cordial frankness, after due discussion of the affair, "that since my sister ever chose to lend her sanction to a gross imposition, she had kept her own counsel in the secret of which she had allowed the

mischiefs to take root and make head."

"It is never too late for reparation of a fault," said Walter

tirmly.

"And I heartily wish further," continued Cruttenden, "that Avesford was here this moment, to offer you advice. My brother's head is a better one than mine. I only wish Avesford was here!"

"What advice do I require to teach me to act like an honest man?" cried Walter. "All that remains for me is to signify to the rightful heir,—to Lord Mornington,—the discovery that has taken place; and resign the honours of which I have so

long defrauded him."

"That is just the point on which I would not have you act uncounselled. I very much doubt whether Matty's unsupported declaration suffices, in a legal point of view, to invalidate a legal certificate of your birth, signed by Sir Richard Norman and attesting witnesses. If it were so, any woman, after losing her husband, might disinherit one child in favour of another."

"It is only under circumstances of time and place so peculiar as those attending my birth, that such a fraud could be attempted," observed Walter. "In ordinary cases, there are

too many family witnesses."

"But in the present (which is all we need consider), supposing the courts of law decide that Matty's declaration is insufficient, and that it proves impossible to obtain confirmatory testimony, to what purpose bring all this scandalous history under the observation of the world, if your title is found legal?"

"Because no testimony is wanting to confirm to me the simple word of Lady Norman. If you could but guess the pang that embitters my feelings in losing the right to idolize that woman as a mother. If you did but know with what warmth of affection I have loved her-

"I do know it, my dear fellow; and I wish she had been worthier of your love. But still, if Lord Mornington's claims

are untenable-

"They cannot—they shall not be! Were all the lawyers in the kingdom to pronounce in favour of my keeping possession of Selwood, I would not remain here a day after the avowals of —of Lady Norman!"

"After all, I can't but feel that you are right," cried Crutt, shrugging his shoulders, after a long pause of deliberation. "I might have guessed that so straightforward and warmhearted a lad had never a drop of Sir Richard Norman's blood in his veins; who was as bitter an aristocrat, and as crooked a contriver, as ever drew breath. What sort of a chap is this rightful heir you talk of? Is he likely to act an honest part by you, and feel the value of the sacrifice made in his favour?"

"Don't call it a sacrifice. Reflect how many years he has

been kept out of his own!"

"And was the fault yours, pray? Mightn't he be kept out

of it to all eternity, but for your integrity?"

"I expect nothing from Lord Mornington," said Walter, proudly. "The wrong I have done him was unintentional; but I should wilfully degrade myself if I consented to become his pensioner. Thanks to Avesford, I have received a good education. I have not been pampered. I have not been bred luxuriously. I have few expensive tastes. As soon as I recover the effect of a blow so unexpected, I shall find courage to exert myself; and (I am vain enough to think) friends to

support my courage."
"You have one at your side, my dear Walter," said Cruttenden Maule, much affected, "who loves you not a jot the less for all that is come and gone. You have been bred under my eye as my nephew. You have become my nephew; and such to the end of time you shall remain. Never fancy that you want a home, Walter. My house is yours. My esteem is yours. Had you continued to occupy your high station, you would have done it honour; but there is none to which you may fall from which you will not rise superior. Give us your hand, my

would do. But I don't feel the less for my plain speaking."

It was long before Walter recovered self-possession to express his sense of all this kindness; but having at length disemburdened his heart of its heavy load, his next ejaculation was,

boy! I don't express myself, maybe, so well as Avesford

" Poor Constance !"

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"Ay, poor Constance!" reiterated Cruttenden Maule. "Such pride as she took in her brother! It will be the breaking of the girl's heart. Matty-Matty!—you have much to answer for!"

"I would give the remainder of my days," said Walter, deeply sighing, "to regain but for a single week my past illusions! If I could only repossess myself of that mother and that sister, Selwood and all the rest would not cost me a pang."

"I tell you what," cried Cruttenden, brightening as with a adden happy impulse. "When all this wretched story is sudden happy impulse. blown over and forgotten, and my sister and niece settled at Halsewell as though they had never belonged to any other place, who knows but you might hit Constance's fancy, and set my conscience at ease by becoming joint-heirs to the property?"

A crimson flush rose to the very brow of Walter, only to subside and leave his face of a ghastly paleness. "There is profanation in the idea!" faltered he. "Constance is my sister, still and ever my sister! There is profanation in the idea!"

The morrow came,—and what a morrow;—what strange silence,—what stranger greetings—in the little family. When they met at breakfast, for the sake of avoiding unpleasant inferences in the household, not one of them had slept; Lady Norman and her daughter were pale and tremulous. Walter appeared to have nerved himself with high resolve. Not the movement of a muscle betrayed the emotions struggling When Lady Norman entered the room, she had not within. courage to direct her eyes towards him. The generous frankness with which he came forward offering her, as usual, his hand, encouraged her to fall upon his neck exclaiming through her tears, "Can you forgive me? Walter-my adopted son!"

Disembarrassed of its heavy load of dissimulation, and the terrors to which that dissimulation had given rise, the heart of Matilda seemed to regain its natural tenderness. Never had Walter been more dear to her than now, when he stood before her deprived by her frenzy of the undue distinctions of fortune. She felt that she had injured him by the betrayal of his secret; he, that he was injured only by the act through which that secret had originated. Or rather, it was not of injury he was conscious. He felt only unhappy; only destitute of the ties which, but the preceding day, had rendered him the happiest and proudest of mankind.

Cruttenden had already given up his political dinner:—his thoughts were absorbed by the affliction which had fallen upon Selwood. Walter was anxious to set off immediately for London, to consult his guardian touching the most becoming mode of communicating to Lord Mornington and his son the extraordinary event that had occurred. But no sooner did he talk of leaving Selwood, than Lady Norman and Constance implored him, almost on their knees, not to let them lose sight of him in his present state of mind; and the good-natured uncle offered to be the bearer of letters of explanation to his brother-in-law, and return with Avesford's opinion, if he found it impossible to absent himself from his parliamentary duties for an interview

with Matilda and his ward.

No sooner had Maule departed on his friendly errand, than the three who were left behind, found each other's presence almost too trying. So long as Cruttenden was among them, with his abrupt manners, jovial voice, and unceremonious dealing, they had found the discussion of the most delicate questions easier than it now appeared to treat of the most indifferent. Neither of them knew in what terms to address the other. Neither of them wished to mark, by a sudden transition of manner, too deep a consciousness of what had occurred. All conversation was an effort. They had too much matter for reflection to be disposed even for each other's society. Yet, a moment after Lady Norman retired to her room, conscience suggested that Walter might, perhaps, fancy himself neglected, nay, designedly avoided; and she accordingly returned to impose a further restraint upon his harassed feelings.

It had been insisted upon by Maule that no steps should be taken at Selwood, till he brought down advice from Walter's guardian; and all the preparations for the attainment of the young baronet's majority were accordingly suffered to proceed. Every hour, some person or other waited upon Sir Walter for orders or instructions which it was repugnant to his feelings to issue. Servants, bailiffs, tenants, overseers, labourers, had questions to ask, or favours to solicit. Not a few of the petitioners quitted Selwood Manor with the impression that the young gentleman, of whose urbanity they had heard so much, could be as ungracious as his neighbours; for he listened without affecting to disguise his absence of mind; and instead of granting a satisfactory answer, begged time to consider questions of which it was clear he had taken no pains to understand a syllable. The heir of Selwood was evidently in a fair way to

be spoiled.

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No sooner had Walter dismissed his importunate solicitors, than he wandered out into the park, shuddering as a thousand trivial objects renewed the anguish arising from early associations. There was the sapling oak surrounded with its fence of honour, of which, guided by his supposed father, his little hands had been made to plant the acorn on his arrival from France, according to the immemorial custom of the heirs of Selwood Manor. There was his old brown pony (Cruttenden Maule's first present to his nephew), shaggy with age, and almost blind, which came neighing to meet him,—so regularly had the kindness of Constance accustomed her brother's pet to be caressed during Walter's absence from England. There was the old

avenue which he had thinned and refreshed. There a new road stumped out towards the woodlands, the direction of which Miss Norman herself had suggested, to include the most picturesque points of the landscape. There were the venerable Gothic almshouses peeping from between the sycamore trees, of which the aged inmates had blessed his birth, and to whom his

very aspect was a spectacle of hope and gladness.

And all these were to be abandoned,—all these to be forgotten, or remembered only as a dream. Early affections were to be obliterated,—early opinions renounced,—nay, even the lofty principles and patriotic aspirings instilled into the wealthy baronet, must, in future, unbeseem the poor foundling who was to depart, self-exiled, from the gates of the Manor. From the garden of Eden, he was to wander into the great wilderness, bringing forth "thorns and thistles, that in the sweat of his face he was to eat bread." The past was to be as nothing. His life was only now beginning. "Would," murmured Walter, as he groaned aloud in agony, "would that it were now to end!"

Still, there were consolatory thoughts! During his brief stewardship at the Manor, he had done no wrong; as a member of society, no ungenerous or unworthy action. Many voices were lifted up to heaven in blessings upon his charity, or in testimony to his forbearance. There was not a token by which he was aware of having an enemy in the world. How different would have been the bitterness of Walter's soul, if followed in

his banishment by the execrations of the poor!
"They will sometimes remember me," he murmured, on attaining an eminence from which, through the leafless trees, the village was discernible; "remember me with kindness, perhaps with regret. I have injured no man, despoiled no man. My career, God be thanked, has not been that of the oppressor!"

As if invoked by the spell of that consoling thought, the spirit of peace stood beside him. Constance, who had followed him at a distance from the house, placed her arm in his, determined to accompany his wanderings. For Lady Norman no longer evinced the smallest jealousy of their being together. The frantic apprehensions which had led to the fatal discovery, were dissipated now that the young people, forewarned of the ground on which they stood, were on their guard against themselves. All anger seemed to have departed from her nature. The evil spirit had been exorcised and cast forth by a superior power.

They walked on together in silence. While apart, a thousand thoughts had arisen for communication; yet now they were side by side, not a word suggested itself. Is was a bright balmy day. The landscape was fresh with vegetation, and varied with sunshine and shade. The woods were budding almost visibly before their eyes: the orchards were sheeted with blossoms; the shrubberies alive with the flutter and song of birds. The deer lay huddled under the still leafless oaks, as if fancying that, since the preceding day, leaves must have sprung forth to shelter them from the vivifying April sun; and the slopes were bright with early flowers—gay-suited courtiers of the spring-pressing forward into bloom. All around was brilliant, genial, hopeful,—resplendent with pro-

mise and prosperity.

At length, Walter ventured some trivial remark on the beauty of the weather, lest his companion should consider him selfishly absorbed; while Constance answered cheerfully, dreading that he might fancy her intent on their relative change of situation. It was impossible for them to indulge at present in any natural impulse. Miss Norman was intent only on proving to Walter the undiminished warmth of her affection; Walter, en concealing from her the undiminished strength of his. After every fresh effort at conversation, they relapsed into deeper silence. Their hearts were full.—too full.—far too full

for words.

At length a turn of the road brought in view, through a vista of the woods, the dome of the family mausoleum, containing the remains of Sir Richard Norman. The sun sparkled upon the tall gilt cross crowning the summit of the consecrated abode of death; recalling to the minds of both the reverence with which they had so often, from childbood, repaired, hand in hand, to the spot, unknown to Lady Norman, whose grief they were unwilling to revive by reference to the object of their filial regrets. Upon their father's grave they had knelt and prayed in secret, uninfluenced by differences of religious faith; recommending their father in the earth to the mercy of their Father who was in heaven; and beseeching the love and intercession of him who had watched over their infancy, and was now, they trusted, a companion of the spirits of just men made perfect.

Unconsciously, they now continued to direct their steps along the mossy path overshadowed with lofty pine-trees; for the solemnity of the place, instead of increasing the reserve of Walter, seemed to encourage him to give utterance to his griefs.

"That he could have so cherished and loved a being alien to his blood!" were the first words that became intelligible to Miss Norman of the incoherent ejaculations that burst in a subdued voice from his bosom. "You, Constance, who know your father only through my representations, - you who were an infant when he was taken from us, -cannot appreciate this. But I swear to you, that even so tenderly as you are strained to the bosom of Lady Norman, even so—every night, every morning—was I clasped to that of her husband. I can feel it now, Constance, -the embrace in which he used to enfold me, till sometimes my petulant childhood rebelled against the earnestness of his

caresses. I can hear them now,—the benedictions he used to lavish on my head. They were those of a tender, fervent, anxious parent. Unless all earthly affections are a pretext, a falsehood, a derision, those embraces and those blessings sprang from the impulse of parental love! Can he have so deceived me? To secure his own purposes, can he have been this habitual dissembler? Can such cold hypocrisy exist in human nature? Oh! no, no; I cannot, will not, believe that the father whom my little heart revered and loved, even as it loved and reverenced the Almighty Being, the origin of our mutual affection, and sorrowed after for years with such bitter and poignant affliction, was thus sporting with an infant's love!"

No answer was to be offered to this outpouring of the soul. After some minutes' pause, Walter resumed aloud the chain of

his reflections.

"Yet it must be so! Lady Norman can have no motive for her avowal. I must be a poor deluded outcast, cheated, even at an age whose innocence is usually its defence against deliberate treachery. Oh, Constance! in this hour of varied torments, it would almost console me could I permit myself to restore my confidence to the memory of him whom I cherished as a father. It was such a deep-seated, such a religious love I bore him! Long as is the period since his death, not a day of all those years have I failed to invoke his name with the pious veneration of a son. I can pardon his having imposed upon the world; but not his having defrauded my young heart of its affections. He should have dealt honestly by his victim. He should have treated the heir of Selwood as his heir, -not as his child; nay, not as doating fathers treat an idolized and faultless child. You, Constance, you, the offspring of his marriage, he never loved or caressed, as he did the foundling. I can understand now why my moth-why Lady Norman seemed jealous for her girl; and would follow us with her infant in her arms, as he led me out into the park or through the village, proud of the admiration I excited. I can understand it all! But, oh! wherefore deal thus cruelly by the child he was mocking with an empty show of tenderness? Constance, may you never experience the pang of withdrawing your reverence from a parent!'

As if aware that the heart of his companion might be already cognizant of such a trial, Walter suddenly checked

himself.

"My own undeserving may have merited my present tortures," cried he, after a vain attempt to keep silence. "Perhaps I was insufficiently grateful for the joy of being the son to such a mother, the brother of such a sister. Conscious as I was of my happiness, I ought to have given breath to hourly thanks for being allied to such spirits of love and peace. It is only now I am alone in the universe,

that I appreciate what it was to be entitled to your tenderness! But yesterday, a mother, sister, kindred, friends. NOTHING!-To feel that in some remote portion of the world, no matter how humble the sphere of society, there were those on whom I held the claim of kinsmanship, would be some allevia-tion. But even that comfort is denied. In the wilderness, the

drop of water is unattainable as the river!"
"Time will soften the blow," faltered Constance, in a low subdued voice. "Time will enlarge your views, and afford you fresh objects of interest. But do not ask me to sympathize in your despondency. I cannot regard you as isolated,-I cannot think of you as an outeast. To me, in spite of every proof, you are still my brother: My heart avows you so, -my heart proclaims you so. Nature cannot be thus deceived, or thus deceitful. Till you voluntarily throw me off and disown me, Walter,

worlds shall not tempt me to call you by any other name!"
"I accept the pledge," said he; "but till my soul can extricate itself from its present maze of wonder and consternation. expect me not to be grateful. At present, every kindlier human

feeling is dormant in my bosom."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The props Of love and loving hearts o'erthrown; what follows But ruin to the structure of my fortunes ?-Most lonely am I in this world of care. Of all forsaken creatures most abandoned! MASSINGER.

TRYING were the hours still remaining to be worn through, ere the return of their messenger from town. Yet when, the following evening, a carriage was discerned through the dusk slowly ascending the hill towards the Manor, not one of the three so deeply interested in the tidings it was to convey, but would have gladly prolonged the suspense against which they had been murmuring.

Lady Norman retreated hastily to her own room; and though unwilling to expose her agitation to her daughter, insisted that Constance should bear her company, to leave poor Walter free and uncontrolled in the interview that was to decide his

destiny.

As he entered the hall to welcome his friend, Walter discerned, unless deceived by the uncertain light, that several persons were alighting from the carriage. From among them, his beloved guardian advanced towards him; and hurrying him beyond the observation of the servants, folded him fervently

and parentally in his arms.

"I always regarded you as a friend, rather than a nephew," faltered Avesford, with great emotion, when he found the heart of the agitated young man beating against his own; "but I am happier than I had a right to expect! By the strange events that have occurred, Walter, I have obtained a son!"

Ere this affectionate greeting could be acknowledged, Mrs. Avesford was by their side, eager to administer her share of

comfort to the afflictions of her long-cherished Walter.

They pitied Lady Norman. But their honest hearts could not overlook the duplicity in which she had dwelt among them. They could believe that she must have suffered deeply. They knew that the first step taken in the path of deceit is the cause of a thousand unanticipated deceptions; as a single untrue line in a mass of building, falsifies the structure. They even suspected that her harassing anxieties, and the perpetual dread of divine vengeance, had eventually bewildered her mind, and excited her to the frenzy instigating her confession. The long concealment, the final motive of disclosure, were alike offensive in their eyes. But compassion suggested forbearance. Her fault must be tenderly dealt with; for it was that of the mother

of Constance.

"My dear boy," said Avesford, when seated beside Walter in the drawing-room, and still affectionately retaining his hand, "I have heard with the sympathy for which I know you will give me credit, the particulars of this wretched story. I approve all your views,—all your proceedings. You have acted as a man of honour, Walter; you have acted as I would wish my ward, my friend, to act. I cannot offer you high lineage or princely fortune, in compensation for those you so honourably resign. But I offer you an honest name, and what the world calls opulence. My wife loves you as I do. Be the child of our adoption,—the comfort of our old age. My fortune is the fruit of my industry, and family prosperous in all its branches. There will be none to resent the disposal of my property; and I have only to bless the goodness of Providence, which supplies to me so worthy a successor, and one so dear to me and mine. Thus far. Walter, for the bright side of your prospects! Against the gloomy one, my dear boy, all my care, -all my affection, -will not suffice to close your eyes. Let me, therefore, counsel you to meet with fortitude the contemplation. Let every step and measure be instigated by the best impulses of your soul. You must see clearly, in order that you may decide discreetly."

Walter replied only by pressing in silence the hand of the friend thus nobly careful of his interests.

"Do not suppose," resumed Avesford, in the same low persuasive tone, "that I wish to undervalue the greatness of your trial, or of the sacrifices you are called on to make. But I would not have you invest them with undue consequence. A man, Walter, is the son of his actions; not of his position in life. You are still on the threshold of your career. On yourself depends the honour or shame of your destinies. Denied the more endearing ties of life, you will also be exempt from their claims upon your time and tenderness. Henceforward, therefore, be your country's, my dear Walter, heart and soul your country's, till by your exertions you have earned a title to leisure and distinction. As the pampered owner of Selwood Manor, such virtue had been difficult,—perhaps impossible. Your misfortunes, therefore, may become a source of merit and of distinction, more flattering than the utmost glories conveyed by descent. As the ardent labourer in an honourable cause, you will stand higher than as the heir of a line whose founder fought at Crecy.

"Your words afford me encouragement," replied Walter, vainly attempting to assume a more cheerful tone. "I shall some day be grateful to you for giving me hope. At present, I

am writhing under the stings of memory."

"Let me now inquire," pursued Avesford, perceiving that his wife and her brother had quitted the room to go in search of their afflicted sister, "whether you have experienced further harshness from Lady Norman since her cruel revelation of the secret

originating in her disingenuousness?"
"None! Neither in that occurrence or any other do I find grounds of complaint. During the last two days, her kindness

to me has been that of a mother."

Avesford bit his lip impatiently, scarcely able to repress the

dissatisfaction gathering in his heart against Matilda.

"I need not ask," he resumed, "whether, till this disastrous epoch, any hint had transpired to excite your suspicions of the peculiarities of your situation. With your frank disposition, Walter, I feel that you would not have concealed them a single hour from me, your friend and guardian. But I am anxious to know whether, during the last three days, any further disclosures have been made?"

"No allusion to the subject has passed Lady Norman's lips. Humbled and repentant, her only object appears to be a repara-tion for the pain she has inflicted."

"So far, well. I have comfort, then, in store for you. A packet is in my custody, Walter, addressed to you by your late father-

My father!" mournfully interrupted Walter.

"By the late Sir Richard Norman," said Avesford, correcting himself, "which may throw some light upon this miserable subject. By his desire, it was to have been given to your hands on the day of attaining your majority. But as it is necessary that a general exposure should take place previous to that event, I conceive that I am acting up to the spirit of my instructions by forestalling, by a few days, the stated period. I have only one condition to make, my dear Walter; that, regarding me as a second father, you permit me to be present during your

perusal of the letter.

"You are afraid to intrust me to myself at so trying a moment," said Walter, gravely. "But fear nothing. After all I have borne, I have courage for the rest. What more, -what worse can betide me? And yet," continued he, when Avesford, after having rung for lights, proceeded to place a heavy packet in his hands, "I own I tremble! At present, I know my birth to be obscure, —mysterious. I may have to learn that it is the result of guilt. Pity me, Avesford,—give me your hand,—give me courage. I may have to learn that I have living parents, and that they are such as disgrace me!"

"Read.—read!" said his compassionate friend; and having brought candles from the distant table, on which at his command they had been placed by the servants, and disposed them so that the full light fell upon the sofa on which Walter had thrown himself, he withdrew to the fireplace. Ere, however, Avesford detached his eyes from his ward, he perceived that Walter's face was deathly pale; that he looked heart-sick,—exhausted. For a moment, he repented having been so precipitate in the delivery of the packet. He saw that Walter had scarcely courage to break the seal; that his hands trembled:

that he was labouring for breath and self-command.

Unwilling to prove a restraint upon his feelings, he contemplated the young man's hesitation as the whole scene stood reflected before him in a large mirror over the chimney-piece against which he was leaning. And though the affectionate guardian longed to be by Walter's side, breathing words of encouragement, he had courage to stand aloof, leaving nature to her struggles, and his protégé to the sustainment of that

strength which is from above.

He was not prepared, however, for the sudden change which soon developed itself in Walter's countenance and deportment. Within the exterior envelope, the contents inscribed in which appeared to excite little emotion, were two letters, one of which he proceeded with eager haste to peruse. At the conclusion of the first half-dozen lines, a sob, a gasp, escaped the bosom of Walter; and ere Avesford could reach him, he had fallen back on the sofa, overpowered by a burst of hysteric tears such as rarely affords assuagement to the sufferings of his age or sex. Walter wept like a child,—like a woman,—as he passionately and incoherently exclaimed, "I am content—I am happy !- Rank and fortune are gone; but the best treasures of affection are left.—Where is she?—Let me go to my sister. Let me enfold her once more in my arms!"

Avesford, who feared that the young man's senses were bewildered, mildly, but resolutely detained him.

"I must not have you alarm her by the sight of all this

distraction," said he. "Compose yourself."

"Compose myself! when, after the tortures of the last three days, I find the worst of my apprehensions groundless," cried Walter. "Oh, Avesford, Avesford!—If you knew what it has been to me to feel that an eternal gulf had arisen between me and the companion of my childhood, -My sister. How proud I am in pronouncing that soothing, tender name. But perhaps," cried he, suddenly checking himself, "Lady Norman's pride may again interfere to deprive me of this consolation? She may not permit her daughter to distinguish with sisterly regard the illegitimate son of her husband!"

This expression removed a load of anxiety from the mind of

Avesford, by affording a key to Walter's incoherence.

"Lady Norman will scarcely refuse her countenance to the adopted child of her sister and brother," replied he. "But does. it appear, by Sir Richard's letters, that she whom we have all

been taxing with duplicity was herself a dupe?"

"My mind is still so bewildered," cried Walter, pressing his hand to his forehead, "that I am scarcely able to develop such a tissue of mysteries. Read, my dear Avesford. You will be better able than myself to see through the intricacies of the case.

And having thrust the envelope and its contents into the hands of his companion, Walter leaned back, screening his face from observation, as if to collect his thoughts or conceal his

emotions.

The moments hurried by unnoticed. The agitation of his feelings left him no leisure for impatience; for it seemed to rouse him from a profound reverie, when, after a deliberate perusal of a letter of many pages, closely written, Avesford returned it to his hand, observing—"I congratulate you, Walter! In all this there is much to afflict, nothing to impart a permanent stigma; nothing to inspire you with any harsher feeling towards the authors of your days than compassion for the frailties of human nature. Your father seems to have endured in his latter days such bitterness of remorse as disarms the severity with which we might otherwise judge so great a fault. Cut off in the prime of life, it is probable that, had Sir Richard outlived the evil influence exercised over him, he might have made atonement and restitution. The delinquent was evidently haunted by dread of exposure. He knew the weakness of his wife. He knew that one who had been wrought upon to abet his errors might be wrought upon to reveal them. Mark the tenor of the appeal addressed to you in the enclosure :- 'I intrust this letter to the honour of my beloved son, to be opened in the event of legal rights being established to invalidate his claim as heir to my title and estates. But in case no such claims should be preferred, I require him to preserve it inviolate during his life,

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and to take steps for its destruction unopened at his decease.' It is not our fault, Walter, that these injunctions have been disobeyed. Lady Norman's revelations rendered it necessary to refer to what I trusted would prove to be testamentary dispositions; and though, alas! these letters serve only to confirm the truth of her assertions, they have at least satisfied the cravings of your affectionate heart, and proved that in all he adventured here and hereafter to advance your interests in life, Sir Richard was actuated less by an unjustifiably vindictive feeling towards his heirs, than by tenderness for the innocent offspring of his illicit love.

Walter Norman seemed to shrink from this reference to the

shame of his origin. But Avesford mildly continued,-

"It is possible, my dear Walter, that your unhappy mother may still survive; and though you have no right to endanger her peace of mind and reputation by a betrayal of the errors of her youth, this second letter, bearing her address, points out your father's desire that you should approach her. On this point, Walter, comfort may be in store for you."
The young man shook his head.

"You, least of all the world, are entitled to judge her harshly. When you have fully perused Sir Richard Norman's appeal to your feelings, you will also be the least inclined. Meanwhile, I have one counsel to bestow. Consecrate your father's avowals to the holiest secrecy. Suffice it to the world that you renounce the inheritance of Selwood. Even Lady Norman must not be too largely trusted. Your sister's youth and Matilda's delicate position render it needless that they should know more than I undertake to disclose to them; that you are the son, though not the heir, of Sir Richard Norman of Selwood Manor."

"Go to Constance, then; go to my friends, and set their minds at ease, by explaining the aspect my affairs have taken," said

Walter, pressing his hands to his throbbing brows.

Instinct seemed to forewarn him that, while the discovery of his origin entitled him to the affection of Miss Norman, it was to create an enemy in her mother. In Matilda's now embittered frame of mind, it was not likely she should regard with indulgence, far less with tenderness, the offspring of one whose rivalship had embittered her youth, and estranged from her child the fondness of its father.

Perplexed as she had been of old by the mysteries enveloping the proceedings of Sir Richard, Matilda was now fated to a more tormenting renewal of her misgivings. Avesford hastened to announce in general terms to the family that Sir Richard Norman, after avowing Walter Norman to be his son, added a codicil to his will, entitling him, in the event of the discovery of his illegitimacy, to a moiety of his disposable property, which had been hitherto assigned as the portion of his daughter; and while Constance, bathed in tears of joy, flew to the arms of her

brother, Lady Norman pursued her agitated interrogations. She insisted upon knowing the name of Walter's mother. "For whom had she and her child been sacrificed?"

"Be content, my dear sister!" was Avesford's stern reply. "Let the secrets of the dead rest with them in the grave. Walter's feelings and Sir Richard Norman's instructions on this delicate topic are to be respected. Henceforward I exercise over him the authority of a father; and my first mandate forbids him to reveal more than is already known of his unhappy birth. My wife and her family will, I know, coincide in my wishes."

Lady Norman stood too much in awe of the honest man whose good opinion she feared she had already forfeited, to press the

question in opposition to his will.

"The poor fellow shall never be mortified by my curiosity!" was Cruttenden Maule's cordial reply to the appeal of his brother-"For all that has come to light, I don't love him and shan't love him a jot the less than when I thought him my nephew. I never had a slighting word or look from Walter, when he was a great gentleman. He shall never have one from me now he's a beggar.

"Softly, softly, my dear Maule!" interposed Avesford, with smile. "Fern Hill is not Selwood Manor. Yet the time may come for Walter Avesford to occupy a more eminent position in

society than Sir Walter Norman.

The jealous heart of Lady Norman experienced a new pang at this announcement. The alien introduced by her weakness into the bosom of her family, was to be detained and cherished there to the detriment of her own daughter! Constance, so beloved at Fern Hill, was to be superseded in the affection of the Avesfords by the illegitimate offspring of her husband!

Conscious that it became her to evince as strong an interest in behalf of the unfortunate Walter as the rest of her family, she dreaded his entrance into the room, when she must rise and Within the last hour he had become hateful to embrace him. her. She longed to look upon his face as though his lineaments were still unknown to her, hoping to decipher there the fatal secret, and detect a resemblance, not to the faithless husband of her youth, but to the woman who had replaced her in Sir Richard's affections. But while she longed, she loathed! It was impossible not to transfer to this living evidence of her wrongs the resentment she was no longer able to expend on him whom she had so gratuitously loved.

Walter appeared, at length, with Constance on his arm, the faces of both irradiated with joy; and, at that moment, he so singularly resembled Sir Richard Norman in the happier period of his career, that Matilda shuddered, as if again in his presence, at the recollection of her broken promise, and the approaching

disgrace of his son.

No one, however, would have inferred, from the young man's deportment, that he was on the eve of a step precipitating him from the summit of prosperity. While Constance continued to whisper, as if never weary of the name, "My brother, my dear brother," he scorned to afflict himself with painful reminiscences. Instead of calling to mind that the hours of his pride were numbered,—that he was spending his last evening at Selwood Manor,—he chose to dwell only mon the allevietions of his lot.

—he chose to dwell only upon the alleviations of his lot.

"Do not pity me, dearest," was his reply to the sorrowful glances directed towards him by Miss Norman. "Consider how much cause I have to be grateful. Reflect what were my feelings yesterday, and from what depths of misery I have been redeemed. To have found a sister,—a father,—when I believed myself condemned to resign for ever the sweetest affections of life, makes me regard myself as more than ever a favourite of

fortune."

Nor did his courage fail him when active measures were to be taken. The dignity and firmness of Walter's deportment were as remarkable as the silly wonderment of the Mornington family at finding themselves invited to take possession of the Selwood property. For some time they treated Sir Walter Norman's letter of explanation as a hoax upon their credulity. But it was too gravely worded for them to persist in the idea; and there needed little logic and less evidence to secure their ultimate conviction of the truth of his declarations. All they had so long suspected

it was now easy to believe.

Nevertheless, Lord Mornington and his son were sensibly touched by the spirit and integrity of Walter's conduct. His views were not those of the world in which they had their being; and as generosity is a quality that often begets generosity in return, they felt piqued by his disinterestedness to make some display of magnanimity. After ascertaining that he was to take the name and succeed to the property of his opulent guardian, they hazarded vast professions of cousinly regard and loud threats of pecuniary munificence; and, encouraged by these friendly demonstrations, Walter entreated that they would limit their kindness to allowing his secession from his honours to pass in silence. No public explanation of his change of circumstances was requisite. The superior rank of Lord Mornington dispensed on his part with any change of title to arrest the attention of society; and when at length it became clear to the neighbourhood and tenantry that there existed a flaw invalidating Walter's claim to the Selwood estates, they settled it among themselves that the misfortune originated in some informality connected with the Protestant Lady Norman's alliance with a Catholic spouse. This view of the case having been confidently announced by the county paper, was duly copied into the London journals, to be transferred at the close of the year into the Annual Register, and

become matter of history; and Matilda, bound to silence by a sense of honour and remorse, as the Morningtons by a sense of gratitude, had the mortification to find that with the majority, Walter—the child of her rival, the blight of her existence,—was henceforward to pass as her own illegitimate

offspring.

In process of time, the editor of the County Chronicle, in order to vary his inventions and keep up the interest of the public, judiciously added, "We learn, with sincere satisfaction, that, in consideration of the legal oversights to which his amiable and talented nephew has fallen a victim, that distinguished gentleman and upright patriot, the honourable member for Liverpool, has entailed upon the only son of the late Sir Richard Norman the whole of his princely estates in Lancashire, Cumberland, and Westmoreland. By the king's letters patent, Walter Norman, Esq., heretofore called Sir Walter Norman, is consequently to assume the name of Avesford. Mr. Walter Norman Avesford is at present residing with his uncle, at his

beautiful mansion at Fern Hill."

"Let them talk and let them write, my dear boy!" was Avesford's reply to Walter's remonstrances against leaving these assertions uncontroverted. "To whom do we owe explanations? I and my family are content to leave the world to its silly conceits. Society may swallow a newspaper invention, more or less, without choking; and those who pin their faith on such authorities deserve to be taken in. You must give these people something better to talk and write about than your birth, parentage, or education. From any young man but yourself, Walter, I should have insisted upon proofs of will and power to work out his independence, ere I secured to him the reversion of my property. But it were unreasonable to exact such exertions from you, who were not reared with the view to professional distinctions; and as to stimulating them by holding out pecuniary temptations, I know you well enough, my dear Walter, to feel sure that the semblance of a bribe would disgust you with your opening career. All I ask, therefore, is, that you will strengthen your understanding by the study of men and books; so that, when called upon to devote your services to your country, you may not be found wanting. It is not only at Fern Hill, but as the friend of the people, and servant of the public, you must learn to supply the place of one who holds it a sin against the Creator to allow those faculties to rust in inactivity, which are intrusted to us for the advantage of mankind."

Avesford shook his head with a good-humoured smile, on noticing with how vague a look of abstraction these exhorta-

tions were received.

"At present, poor fellow, it is labour lost to preach to him," was the good man's wise conclusion. "Such a shock as he has

received, is not to be overcome in a day. We must leave time for his emotions to subside. A visit to the continent will set the instincts of that affectionate heart at rest. Then let him fairly start in his new career."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Thy place is fill'd—thy sceptre wrung from thee.

No bending knee will call thee Cæsar now;

No humble suitors press to speak for right;

No—not a man comes for redress of thee,

For how canst thou help them and not thyself.

SHAKSPEARE.

Four months had elapsed from the period of these startling vicissitudes. The harvest, whose green and tender blades scarcely clothed the ground at the epoch of the Normans' abandonment of Selwood Manor, being ripe and heavy for the sickle, and Walter had reluctantly submitted to the advice of his adopted family, that he should remain in England till deeds of mutual release were signed between himself and the Mor-

ningtons.

No sconer, however, were his affairs finally adjusted, than he took his departure for the continent, alone, absolutely alone. The faithful domestic many years attached to his service, being a native of Selwood, was considered by Walter at present an unsafe companion, and left at Fern Hill till his return. Yet though thus lonely, his spirits were less than usually depressed. He was excited by the consciousness of manifold duties to be fulfilled. His first object was to address to the Avesfords an outpouring of the feelings which had for months struggled undivulged in his bosom. In England, his heart had been so wounded, his soul so perplexed, that he found himself unmanned by emotion whenever he attempted to give utterance to his gratitude for the more than fatherly protection accorded to him by his guardian, and the more than motherly affection testified towards him by Bessy; who, remembering with gratitude the kindness shown by Walter towards her poor infirm Charles, felt that she could not repay him by too dear a sympathy.

Of all this, Walter was now able to express his consciousness. He could write, though he could not speak; and his full heart hung over the letters he despatched to the Avesfords with an excess of gratitude only to be imagined by those who have been snatched out of the depths of misery by the tender

mercies of a friend.

To Avesford, however, his letter contained somewhat more than these acknowledgments. Walter had so long accustomed himself to submit, not to the authority, but the counsels of his enlightened guardian, that, as yet, he had never summoned courage to resist Avesford's recent disposal of his destinies. Disappointment, however, had matured his reason; till on some points he was clearer sighted than the disinterested friend

intent only upon securing his happiness.

"Do not think me ungrateful for the noble intentions you have announced towards me," wrote he, "when I entreat that you will permit me to work out my fortunes in some professional career. It is not for me, my dear friend, to eat the bread of idleness. The line of employment likely to be most acceptable to you, and profitable to myself, is, I fear, the law. But my inclinations point otherwise. Forgive me, but I have not yet fortitude for England. The knowledge of foreign languages acquired during my long sojourn on the continent will probably avail me in a diplomatic career, and I may obtain an appointment as attaché. Any mission, from one end of Europe to another, would meet my views. I have no predilections to guide my choice. Only give me an occupation to save me from myself! Only let me prove that my industry may be relied on; in order that Constance and her mother, on seeing me in the road to independence, may be persuaded to accept back that moiety of Sir Richard Norman's personal property which, but for me, would have been the undivided portion of his daughter.

Your interest, my dear Avesford, would readily obtain this favour from government. But as you have never shackled your political independence by the smallest obligation. I appeal to you whether you may not prefer my obtaining the appointment through some personal friend. My intimacy with the son of the duke of ———— leaves me no apprehension of being refused.

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"Thus far, as a matter of inclination. But even as a matter of prudence, I have strong arguments in favour of my project. In spite of the sage and magisterial airs I have sometimes seen him assume, my guardian has not yet entered his eight-and-fortieth year; and should some unforeseen misfortune deprive him of the beloved companion so dear to us all, a second marriage might render him the father of children whom even his partiality would repent having disinherited in favour of a

"Suffer me, therefore, I entreat, to reverse the common order of things, and dictate to my benefactor the mode and measure of his bounties. During your lifetime, grant me such assistance as, after my act of restitution to Constance, will maintain me till my official services are repaid by the means of selfsupport. Lacking nearer and dearer heirs, your intentions in my favour may eventually be fulfilled. Meanwhile (and long be the interim prolonged), leave me your esteem, and permission

to labour for my independence."

This letter once despatched. Walter felt in some degree relieved from his burden of cares, and at liberty to resign himself to the influence of the fixed idea which was beginning to form the torment and consolation of his existence, - his mother !- There were moments, indeed, when prolonged contemplation of the subject disturbed his young mind almost to madness; for Walter was still endowed with the holy illusions, the generous candour of youth. He had still an honest trust in the perfectibility of human nature; still that warm aspiration after the good and true, which, whatever may be the turpitude of original sin, proves that the corruptions of the world beget sinfulness of far deeper dye. He had not yet tamed down his standard of excellence to the dwarfed and diminutive scale which the experiences of society force upon our adoption; nor been compelled, by circumstances, to offer his devotion to shrines whose idols he knew to have been profaned. Excellence was the object of his fervent worship. He believed in virtuous women and honest men; nor could he at present figure to himself a being convicted of humiliating frailties, whom it was possible to love and to honour.

Yet such must be his mother! A fallen woman,—a faithless wife,—an unnatural parent;—who had surrendered the offspring of her guilt to be reared for a fraudful purpose in a foreign country, without deigning a second time to cast her eyes upon it! He had dwelt among pure and high-principled women. Lady Norman and her sister were chaste in word, look, and thought, almost to coldness; and these, with his gentle sister, formed his types of womanly excellence. But from these, he now must withdraw his veneration, to bestow it on all that was

most faulty and most degraded.

Sometimes, however, after weary and oppressive meditations upon the isolation of his existence, he found himself gradually yearning after this unknown and absent mother—the woman in whose veins his blood was flowing; the woman in whose eyes he fancied he should decipher all the mysteries of his destiny; the woman from whose lips he was to wring words of endearment—words of welcome. Then came the counter apprehension that the blessing he sighed for might prove a curse; that he might be abjured and rejected. He might have to work his way to the heart of his mother through the cuirass of worldly prejudices and predilections. She might occupy a position, from which to descend for the recognition of her son, were ruin and infamy!

But in order fully to develop the perplexity of his feelings, it becomes necessary to unfold the secret revealed in the testa-

mentary letter of Sir Richard Norman.

The packet addressed to Walter, to be opened on the attainment of his majority (in the event of a claim having been preferred to the heirship of Selwood), was dated from the Manor House, in the year 1819, and conceived in the following terms:

"Should circumstances eventually require this letter to be placed before my son, it will reach his hands at a moment when disappointment and mortification have excited to the utmost his resentment against that unknown father, destined, perhaps, to fall into the grave ere his boy is enabled to form a correct judgment of his character, or measure the strength of his affections.

"For you are my son, Walter—my son in kin and tenderness—though not, alas! in legitimate heirship. Your mother is of honourable birth—your father of honourable descent. Yet the laws of the land deny you ancestry—deny you a social position—deny you all but such honours as may be conquered by your own exertions—for you are not the offspring

of lawful wedlock.

"Forgive me, Walter! Your father calls upon you from the grave for pardon and for pity. Judge me not too severely.

"A man born to the worldly advantages I inherited is esteemed an object of envy by the multitude. Examine such destinies, my son, and in most cases you will find them invalidated by some drawback or incompetency, qualifying the magnitude of the blessing. Human life would otherwise be chequered by too cruel an inequality, and the fate of the poor who do lack and suffer hunger, convey a bitter accusation against the justice of Providence. The evil influences which surround the cradle of the rich, often counterbalance the blessings of prosperity.

ings of prosperity.

"My boyhood, Walter, was perplexed between the adulation of menials and preceptors, and the caustic jeers of a narrow-minded guardian. An object of rapacity to the former, of jealousy to the latter; there was an ulterior purpose in every measure of which I was the object. Giles Norman desired only to reduce me to submission; my dependants to purchase my favour by raising me to undue consequence; and between the wounds inflicted by the one, and the unguents applied by the rest, a gangrene was engendered to poison my future existence.

I became a reckless egotist!

"My marriage had its origin in a feeling of revenge. I will not avouch that a fair face had not its momentary influence in promoting the alliance. But the discrepancies of the match were overlooked in the hope of thwarting and disappointing the the man—the heir—who, through life, had been the object of my abhorrence.

"In my turn I was destined to disappointment. No son came to bless my marriage-bed. Giles Norman and his tribe

were still triumphant. I, who had been flattered by my domestics and the priest who conciliated my favour that he might devote it to the Catholic cause—I, the pampered, adulated Sir Richard Norman, was denied a blessing vouchsafed to the poorest cottager on my estate. It was but one of the common crossings and disappointments of life. Yet I resented it as an

injustice of Providence.

As there was but one person on whom I could wreak the growing moroseness of my temper, I became a tyrant to my wife. At that period I almost detested Matilda. Her very meekness was an offence. It moved my indignation to see her serene, smiling, happy, at moments when I was smarting under some covert insult offered by the Normans. I had overlooked the difference of station and religious faith existing between us; yet, instead of securing, by these sacrifices, a sympathizing, subservient companion, I had obtained only a smiling, affable wife, content to sail in the sunshine of my lot, but careful to avoid the depths and rocks diversifying its smoothness.

"I now discovered how little the unaccomplished mind and vapid conversation of Lady Norman were calculated to adorn and sweeten domestic life. I fancied myself entitled to higher companionship. The calm submissiveness which ought to have assuaged my petulance, served only to render me more over-

bearing.

"Such was my state of mind, Walter, when the unexpected opening of the continent enabled me to visit Paris. The Abbé, having motives for desiring to appear before his foreign superiors, accompanied by his wealthy and influential pupil, strenuously invited me to share his journey. The project was unopposed by Matilda; and, eager to escape from my embittered home, and the tauntings of her vulgar relations, I hastened to France.

"You, my son, who will have become familiar from an early age with the brilliancy and spirit of foreign life, can scarcely appreciate the sensations of one translated for the first time from a life so cold and monotonous as mine, to a scene like Paris, enlivened by the presence of the allied armies, and cheered by the unexpected restoration of peace. It was a moment of general joy, universal hilarity, and new life entered into my soul. Spring was in its prime, and every heart seemed to beat in unison with the season. Never had I been so elated. never so reckless. No sacrifice was to be spared that conduced to the delight of an epoch never again to recur in the weary waste of my existence.

"The Abbé was not an unobservant spectator of my enthralment by the intoxications of the hour. Absorbed in vulgar pleasures, I announced my intention of spending at Paris the allotted period of my absence; and this did not suit the projects of the old man, who recoiled from no artifice or astuciousness tending to further the interests of his church. It was necessary to his plans that the rich English Catholic should accompany him to the presence of the sovereign pontiff, and to

Italy he was determined that I should proceed.

"Had Father O'Donnel exercised over my mind the authority with which my position as his disciple ought to have invested him, he would have appealed to me as my tutor and director, to fulfil his object. But his office had never been worthily exercised. Throughout the intercourse between us, it was my will that commanded, his wisdom that obeyed; and on the present occasion, as on all others, he had recourse to stratagem to procure what ought to have been obtained by

"'I have satisfaction in store for you!' said he, with a gracious smile, one evening when, on returning from a riotous dinner-party to dress for a ministerial ball, I found him seated quietly in our old-fashioned hotel in the Rue de Grenelle. have to present to your acquaintance, my dear Sir Richard, two ladies almost as virulent as yourself against the family at

Grove Park.

"'Two English-women? I am sick of them!' cried I: their ceremonious insensibility, at all times wearisome, is not to be tolerated in contrast with the graceful vivacity of the Parisians.

"'My ladies are neither ceremonious, insensible, nor English,' replied the Abbé; 'though one of them, I admit, bears the ill-omened name of Norman.'

"'Worse and worse!' cried I. 'Let me hear no more of them. I am in haste to dress for the duke of Wellington's ball.

"'Dress as quickly as you please; the quicker the better. For I have promised that you shall accompany me for half an hour to the Comtesse de L---'s on your way to the Faubourg St. Honoré.'

"'The Comtesse de L-'s?' I exclaimed, startled by mention of a name connected with the glories of Napoleon's camp, I thought you announced and the splendours of his court.

just now a Mrs. or Miss Norman?

"' What's in a name?' cried the old man, jocosely, overjoyed to perceive that he had succeeded in captivating my attention. 'Put on all your attractions for a presentation to two of the

loveliest women in existence.

" Half an hour afterwards we stepped together into my carriage, and were conveyed to a handsome hotel, in the Faubourg du Roule, which I had already noticed for its noble gardens skirting the Champs Elysées. After being ushered up a magnificent staircase, past the grand apartments of the rez de chaussée, we were introduced into a suite of rooms on the second floor, the atmosphere of which announced it to be the

abode of luxury and beauty. Elegance predominated in the choice of every object that met the eye. Rare flowers were scattered in several of the richly-furnished rooms through which we passed. But the small octagon chamber, decorated with delicate arabesques, which terminated the suite, contained only commodious seats; and scarcely had we entered, when I was compelled to desist from my observations, on finding myself presented by the Abbé to a young and beautiful woman, who closely followed us into the room; leaving the doors open into an adjoining saloon, more dimly lighted than the boudoir.

"'For the first time, my dear Norman, I have the pleasure to see you disposed in favour of a relation,' said the Abbé. 'Madame Norman is just returned from England, after an unsatisfactory pilgrimage from Trieste to Grove Park, whose inmates she regards with an aversion almost equal to your

own.'

"The mystery was thus developed. The lovely stranger before me was the Italian wife of my cousin Rupert; and the motive of her journeying to England was speedily explained.

"The daughter of an opulent nobleman of Idria, engaged in commercial speculations, Madame Norman had visited Vienna with her family, at the period of Napoleon's occupation of the city; when old Marcodani, in attempting to conciliate the Emperor's favour for his mercantile projects, had been partly drawn in, partly compelled, to bestow upon one of the Imperial generals the hand and fortune of his younger daughter. At the period of the marriage, Benedetta Marcodani was scarcely fifteen,—timid, affectionate, delicate,—a fragile flower, likely to be crushed by the iron hand of the uneducated man to whom she was thus roughly assigned. Her reluctance was unconcealable and unconcealed. But the tears of whining girls were received by the Emperor with as little concern as the resistance of some petty prince of the empire. The remonstrances of old Marcodani were dismissed with a pinch of snuff; and the trembling bride appeared the following day at the high altar of St. Stephen's, escorted by the notabilities of the imperial court. Monsieur le Général Comte de L-, Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour, was enriched; and Benedetta became a wretch for life!

"Such was Madame Norman's brief sketch of her sister's

history.

dark eyes as she proceeded in her narration. 'We were motherless, and I had been unto her as a mother, and trained her warm heart and noble mind to aspire after happier destinies. Judge, therefore, what it was to me, to behold the gentle girl, whom I had taught to revere the decencies of a quiet domestic home, flung into the arms of a man who, without an idea beyond

his brigade and his meerschaum, regarded his wife as one among the gilded toys lavished upon him by the emperor as a reward for his services. I discerned this with clearer perception than poor Benedetta. All she felt was simple repugnance. But instead of listening to my entreaties that his young wife might, for the present, remain with her family at Trieste, the general sent her off, under the escort of one of the emperor's chamberlains who was conveying despatches to Paris, to await his return at the close of the campaign.

"Madame Norman described, with so much feeling and energy, the affliction of the young girl thus prematurely banished from her home and country, that it was impossible not to sympathize in her emotion. She alluded also to her almost motherly terrors in knowing her unprotected sister to be exposed to the temptations of a luxurious and licentious

court.
"'On this point, however,' she continued, 'I was re-assured,
The violence of character by the character of the general. The violence of character which alarmed me for Benedetta's personal comfort, reassured me for her honour. The Comte de L—— was not a man to be trifled with. The Comte de L—— was not a man whose wife could be approached with levity. Among the dangers and difficulties besetting a young girl of sixteen, compelled to play an ostensible part in the most brilliant of European courts, that

peril was spared!

"Benedetta, meanwhile, was installed in this splendid hotel: where all the gifts and pleasures that opulence could bestow, courted her enjoyment. The count treated her as a child, to be conciliated with toys and sweetmeats; and in con-formance with Napoleon's desire that the wives of his generals should enhance, by their style of living and appearance, the magnificence of the imperial court, the young and lovely countess was distinguished by the richness of her jewels,-her equipage, — her entertainments. Still, though Benedetta's letters contained no murmurs against her destiny, I could discern that the child was unhappy. Affection, at her age the most perfect gift, -was wanting! She was alone in her splendid. palace; -lonely in heart and soul, -a companionless and miserable exile.

" 'Fortunately, her appointment as lady of the bed-chamber to the new empress, almost her own countrywoman, soon supplied an occupation for her leisure. For the count, occupying a high command, was now with the army in Spain. Napoleon's confidence in his high military capacities compelled him to remain absent from Paris; nor did he express dissatisfaction at being thus banished from the home which an ill-assorted marriage had stripped of its attractions. How was a man of his age and pursuits to find conversation for Benedetta?—a child trembling at the sound of his rough words, and the sight of his forbidding countenance!— You may treat it as a jest, continued Madame Norman, perceiving that a smile overspread my own, 'but the Comte de L-was, perhaps, the only man in Paris who looked with perfect unconcern upon the lovely countenance and beautiful form of my sister.

"'Had it been otherwise, Benedetta's affections would have been gradually attached by the devotion of a heart even so rude as that of her husband. My sister is an enthusiast. military honours were not without value in her eyes. took pride in his distinctions, and would have taken pleasure in his love. But it was not to be! The Comte de Ltreated her, at best, with the lofty indulgence of a superior; never with the tenderness of a husband.

"In time, therefore, her awe became dislike. The countess's consolation lay in his absence. Monsieur le Comte, in Spain, and Madame la Comtesse in Paris, comprehended her notions of matrimonial happiness. Attached to her duties,

pure in word and deed, there was no fear that the repugnance she had vainly attempted to surmount, should lead to those unhappy results too frequently attendant on a compulsory

marriage.
"'Thus was my dear sister situated,' continued Madame Norman, encouraged by my unaffected interest in her narration, 'when the sudden downfall of Napoleon caused what was termed the ruin of her fortunes. The general, faithful to the falling cause, was dismissed at once from his high command; and, had he been inclined, might have returned at once to Paris. On pretext, however, of precarious health, he chose to remain in the south; and having issued his commands to his wife to remain in the capital, it was clear that he absented himself from home either from contempt of the woman to whom he had been united by his despotic master; or because engaged in political projects that rendered the ties of domestic life

importunate and dangerous.

"'At this juncture my sister summoned me to her assist-Eager to be clasped once more to the bosom of her second mother, Benedetta, on the entrance of the allies into Paris, implored me to comfort her with my presence and coun-In ten days, sir, I was here. I found her full of perplexities. The count was known to be an object of suspicion to the restored government; and it was generally doubted whether he would obtain the sanction of the allied sovereigns to his proposal of sharing the exile of the emperor. It was but natural that Benedetta should look forward with hope to his fixing his abode at Elba; and, on learning that the English government was supposed to exercise absolute control over the household of Napoleon, she implored me to secure the influence of my

husband's family. The marriage of his elder brother, Mr. Norman, with the daughter of an influential cabinet minister,

gave us assurance of a favourable result.

"Some weeks ago, therefore, I proceeded to England,—to London,—to the family of my husband. Of noble origin and endowed with a handsome fortune, in every respect the equal of my husband, I was prepared to receive from them the atten-

tion due to a woman, a stranger, and a relative.

"'But how, oh! how was I welcomed! By some with coldness,—by some with scorn. Though unconnected with Napoleon or the French nation otherwise than by my sister's marriage, I was treated as an enemy,—an upstart. One would have imagined, from my cruel reception at Grove Park, that my hands were embrued in English blood, and that I visited England intent upon advancing the interests of the usurper. From Lady Catherine Norman, in particular, I met with the most cruel slights. Though my patience did not enable me to support many days the mortifications heaped upon me, I had time to appreciate the insolence of that hateful woman. I spoke of appealing to you, as the head of the Norman family, to engage your influence in behalf of my poor Benedetta. But Lady Catherine informed me, with a contemptuous smile, that, as a Catholic, your interference would be rather injurious than otherwise; and that, till the succession of her son to your title and estates, the Normans of Selwood were likely to remain obscure and powerless.

"'For a time, every sentiment was absorbed in resentment at being thus harshly treated by my husband's family. But the claims of Benedetta were stronger than even those of pride. I knew that unless the object of the Count de L—— could be secured, a life of misery was in store for her; the terror of her husband being so great, that she might be tempted to any rash

act securing her from his society.

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"A new channel of influence, meanwhile, has presented itself to my hopes. My father's only brother, Father Giuseppe Marcodani, Superior of the Jesuits' College at Rome, is supposed to possess considerable influence with Cardinal Gonsalvi; and his interference, I am assured, might operate wonders in our favour. With this view, I am about to visit Italy; and having been recommended by my uncle's correspondents in Paris to seek the protection of a brother of his order so eminent as the Abbé O'Donnel, I obtained some days since an introduction to your venerable friend. The rest you will divine:—his amazement, on learning the name and connections of the sister of the Comtesse de L—; and mine, on discovering in the pious ecclesiastic whose escort to Italy would be so singular a comfort to my unprotected condition, the friend and preceptor of my husband's kinsman.'

"'You intend then, madam, to honour the abbe by becoming the companion of his journey?' I inquired, fascinated by the graceful frankness of Madame Norman.

"'That must depend upon yourself!' she replied with a 'The abbé assures me that he is too deeply pledged to Sir Richard Norman to-

"'Let that be no obstacle,' cried I. 'It will afford me sincere delight to forward the object of Madame la Comtesse by ceding

my place in the carriage to her charming sister.'
"The words had scarcely passed my lips, however, before I repented my promptitude; not only on account of the vexation which suddenly overcast the brows of O'Donnel, but because a glance at Madame Norman's lovely countenance brightened by the impulses of joy and gratitude reminded me that such companionship might have imparted a charm to my Italian journey. The pledge, however, was already accepted; and O'Donnel turned the conversation to general subjects, as if reserving to

himself the right of private remonstrance.

"All I saw of Madame Norman served to increase my admiration. The exquisite modulation of her voice, the ingenuous simplicity of her manners, derived new charm from contrast with the vain and affected Parisians. Nevertheless, I experienced some curiosity to behold the Benedetta in whose behalf my services were thus cavalierly enlisted. And though Madame Norman excused the absence of her sister on the plea that extreme timidity rendered it painful to the Comtesse de Lto present herself before strangers, I discerned more than once the outline of a tall, graceful figure, traversing the adjoining saloon: and doubted not that the anxieties of the young countess were rendering her an unseen auditress of our conversation.

"It became necessary, however, to take leave. Madame Norman's allusion to the evening engagement, which caused me to appear in full dress, left me no alternative but departure; and my whole way from her presence to the illuminated porte cochère of the duke, was harassed by the vehemence of the abbé's remonstrances. He would not hear of my abandoning my journey to Italy. He represented in colours equally glowing the advantage our cause might derive from the establishment of an immediate connection between myself and the Vatican, and the delight I should derive from the society of so charming a companion as Madame Norman; while I, in my turn, alluded with a smile to the risks we might mutually incur from such familiar association.

"'My presence,' replied the old man, with indignation, 'will, I trust, afford a guarantee, both to Rupert Norman and the world, that an affectionate sister, performing an act of disinterested service, was not insulted on her pilgrimage by the

gallantry of a well-born Englishman!

"To pacify his irritation, I consented to visit Madame

Norman on the morrow, and solicit her approval of our change of projects. But it was chiefly the hope of beholding one whose beauty I had heard described in Parisian society as exceeding that of the Duchesses de Montebello, de Rovigo, Madame de St. Jean d'Angely, and other distinguished ornaments of the imperial court.

"Unaware that morning visits are, in Parisian society, the exclusive privilege of intimacy, I made so decided a claim to admittance by presenting to the porter a card bearing the name of the countess's sister, and announcing myself as a relative,

that I was immediately desired to pass on.

"The ladies are in the garden," said the porter, pointing to an old-fashioned gilded gate, opening from the court-yard; and following the direction, I found myself in one of those charming retreats which impart to the hotels of the Faubourg du Roule the charms of a villa or country-house. A gardener was mowing on the lawn the first grass of the season; and in the lady who sat on a rustic bench under the almond-trees, in blossom, enjoying the freshness of the scene, I fancied I could recognize my cousin's handsome wife.

"A nearer survey convinced me of my error. The lovely creature towards whom I was advancing was ten years younger, and far more beautiful than her sister. There was something singular in the combination of premature intelligence imparted to her countenance by an early encounter with the trials of life, with her air of extreme youth. Her clear brown Italian complexion seemed to derive delicacy from the exquisite regularity of her features; and the softness of her expressive eyes was enhanced by the vivid blushes which almost every word and

glance called into her cheeks.

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"My intrusion was duly explained, and quickly pardoned. Already prejudiced in my favour by the warm encomiums of my venerable preceptor,—perhaps, even of her sister,—the countess seemed to adopt as a relative the man who had been so promptly interested to become her friend. She bade me take a place by her side. She inquired with graceful earnestness into my occupations at Paris;—smiled at my enthusiasm,—reproved my prejudices. At the close of half an hour's conversation, I felt as though, till that moment, I had never looked upon the face, or listened to the voice of woman. I held my breath that I might not miss the slightest murmur of her soft, melodious intonation. I was afraid of losing a look,—a word,—a gesture. "Such, Walter, such was your unhappy mother!—

CHAPTER XL.

We met in secret;—doubly sweet,
Some say they find it so to meet;
Not such my creed! I would have given
My life but to have called her mine,
In the full view of earth and heaven.
Byrox,

"BRIEFLY let me pass over the ensuing time; moments of frantic joy, to be followed by years of anguish and remorse. While attempting to influence my conduct by unworthy means, the abbé not only defeated his own purpose, but lent his aid towards heaping shame and misery upon my head.

"Though, true to his calculations, I did consent to accompany him to Rome, it was not, as he conjectured, under the influence of the attractions of his fair companion. No! my plans were already matured. For worlds, I would not at that moment have absented myself from Paris. I contrived to have letters awaiting me at Avignon, pretending to necessitate my return to Selwood. He had, of course, no plea to oppose; and leaving the old man to pursue his journey with his lovely charge, I hastened back to Paris,—to the side of Benedetta; and under the semblance of brotherly friendship, became her companion, counsellor, comforter, seducer. Do not imagine that, because I thus anticipate the period of her fall, the defenceless and unadvised creature was an easy prey. But the harassed existence to which she had been subjected, rendered her more than other women susceptible to the influence of tenderness. Of late years, she had dwelt among heartless flatterers, or been exposed to the harshness of a tyrant. She had never shared the confidence of affection,—had neither trusted nor been trusted, neither pardoned nor been forgiven. And now, in the interchange of familiar regard, though still uncorrupted in mind,still unswerving in principles,—she confided in me and I in myself, till we were roused from a dream of happiness by the consciousness of guilt.

"Never, my poor Walter, may you experience such selfreproach as mine, in witnessing the remorse by which that young heart was overwhelmed. Benedetta gave herself up to her sorrow as unreservedly as she had done to her affection; and when, after two months' absence, Madame Norman returned from her fruitless journey, there was not even a momentary attempt at concealment on the part of her sister.

"'Stella must know all,' cried she, on the announcement of

'She shall not enfold me to her bosom believing me to be still good,-still pure,-still innocent. She shall know all! Then let her heart determine whether she will still

accept me as a sister.

""Exert your courage, my poor girl,' was, on the other hand, Madame Norman's exhortation on re-entering the apartment of the countess. 'The general's application is rejected. Your husband is exiled to his estates in Provence. I had an interview with him last week at Aix, and have promised to superintend the sale of his property in Paris, and escort you as speedily as possible to his protection.

"'He will kill me!' burst at once from the pale lips of

Benedetta.

"'No! his disposition and character have, on the contrary undergone a happy revolution. He is now all kindness and indulgence; and reconciled to his losses and disappointments by the hope that domestic peace will comfort his declining years.

"'He will kill me!' persisted Benedetta, in the same wild. incoherent tone. 'Sister! I, too, am an altered being;—an abject, miserable wretch. I have disgraced his name. I am

about to become a mother!'

"Fearful was the burst of indignant passion with which this confession was received by the impetuous woman, who had so long rejoiced in the well-doing of her nursling,-her pupil,her more than sister. On me and on Benedetta her reviling fell with equal violence. The vehement Italian had scarcely words to convey her scorn of the twofold perfidy degrading my conduct. I, a husband,—a man of honour,—a man of noble blood,—to have stooped to a falsehood, in order to involve her fair and innocent sister in a maze of guilt! She despised me and made no concealment of her contempt. But while I honoured the warmth with which she rejected all palliation of our fault, I trembled for the consequence of such unrelenting violence upon the gentle nature and precarious health of Benedetta.

"I have already admitted to you, that I had quitted England disgusted with my dull home and dreary prospects. Candour compels me to add that I now proceeded to act ungenerously and unjustly towards my wife. As an apology for conduct utterly inexcusable, I represented in strong colours to Madame Norman and her sister, not only my indifference towards Matilda, but her undeservingness of my affection. I described her as a cold and careless wife; and the lovely and accomplished women, who now absorbed my affection, already disposed to regard with abhorrence the heretic bearing my name, whom they could not persuade themselves to regard as my lawful wife, gradually desisted from their entreaties that I would return home.

"It was not, however, of Matilda, that either they or I thought at that moment. Our immediate consideration was the Count de L-. How was he to be tranquillized, -how tampered with, -how deceived with vain pretences, into sanctioning the prolongation of Benedetta's sojourn in Paris? To obtain a medical certificate of her indisposition was no difficult matter; for the afflicted creature was, in truth, so changed, that her nearest friends often passed her without recognition; and to despatch it to Aix without delay was urgent,—for even Stella admitted her conviction that, should the count conceive the slightest suspicion of the truth, no personal danger to be incurred by breaking through his sentence of banishment would deter him from hastening to Paris, and wreaking his vengeance on the offenders.

"' Do not deceive yourself,' said Madame Norman. 'Neither strength nor courage would avail to secure my sister from his violence. Benedetta would be sacrificed,—justly, perhaps, but barbarously sacrificed,—to the injured honour of a man, unsusceptible on all other points; on that, delicate and sensitive as a woman. Do not, I repeat, deceive yourself. Let the Count

de L-arrive at Paris, and she is lost!'

"Though convinced that the excited mind of Stella saw things in an exaggerated light, the agitation of her sister's

mind testified that her terrors, at least, were real.

"Renouncing, therefore, every suggestion of personal pride, I hastened to exercise my political influence in every attainable channel, in order to obtain the sanction of the English government to the projects of the count. My solicitations were successful beyond my hopes. In the course of the ensuing month, the general was permitted to embark at Marseilles, for the Isle of Elba!

"Reassured on this painful point, Madame Norman's next anxiety regarded the disposal of the child about to be born to Benedetta. She exacted that it should be removed, at once, from the presence of the young mother. She would not trust the gentle heart of Benedetta, to so much as a momentary impulse of maternal love. For well did she surmise that, if once permitted to fold her babe to her bosom, she was likely to hazard all risks to keep it by her side for evermore. The project of your adoption as my legitimate offspring was hers, exclusively hers. She demanded the sacrifice at my hands. Influenced, perhaps, as much by detestation of the Normans, as by affection for her sister, she required that, in case Benedetta's child should prove a son, it should be adopted as the heir of Selwood.

"To prepare Matilda for this imposition would, I feared, prove no easy task. Circumstances, however, favoured my plans. Lady Norman was eager to accompany me to Paris; and in the course of the winter, Matilda acceded to my entreaties with a gentleness and grace that filled me with remorse. She consented that 'a foundling' should be imposed upon the world as her son; little dreaming that the child so designated was the object of my dearest affection.

"I am to blame, perhaps, my son, for dwelling upon circumstances better buried in oblivion. But, in addressing this letter to you, I feel as though I had for the first time found a friend to whom to unfold the history of my trials. And bitter, trust me, were my sufferings throughout that trying winter; divided between the society of a lovely and confiding wife, whose merit and triumphs in the world reflected distinction upon my name; and a woman equally lovely,-equally confiding,—whose peace of mind I had wrecked for ever. Day after day, did I wander from the side of Lady Norman and the brilliant festivities of the Bourbon court, to the gloomy seclusion of the harassed and suffering Benedetta; perpetually exciting their anxieties, yet incurring the reproaches of neither. Matilda was too gentle, and her rival too deeply humbled, to experience resentment; and I, a source of misery to both,—to

both a traitor,—was by both generously forgiven.

"In the midst of these perplexities, with the moment drawing near which was to crown my delinquency by a new act of fraud, just as Benedetta's situation became unconcealable and her sorrows more heavy than she could bear, came the news of Napoleon's return. The Comte de L— was already in France, and about to visit Paris. Stella, who, in her strict seclusion at the Hôtel de L—, had heretofore experienced some solace in the idea of the death-blow she was about to deal to the vanity of Lady Catherine Norman (who, by a climax of evil fortune, was parading her follies on the continent), was now thoroughly overcome. Though the general was invested with a command likely to detain him in the south, he might, at any moment, be required to march through Paris on his way to the army gathering on the frontiers of Belgium; and between remorse at being compelled to require Matilda's sojourn in an enemy's country at such a juncture, and the anguish of apprehending new perils for my lovely, unhappy, uncomplaining Benedetta, my mind was nearly distracted. I knew that the hour which gave birth to her child, was to be that of our eternal separation. I was to receive and bear you at once to the Château de St. Sylvain, where Lady Norman was residing; and from that hour to return no more to her presence. On such conditions only, had Stella lent her aid to the concealment of this unhappy affair. She would not hear of further injury to the unsuspecting general, whose letters avouched the warmest and most heartfelt interest in the indisposition of his wife. Satisfied that the expected heir of Selwood would be reared in the Catholic faith, and tenderly watched over by a faithful domestic of the Marcodani family now attached to the service

of Matilda, the babe and its unfortunate father were to become

strangers to them for ever.

"You will readily conceive that this harsh resolution was dictated by Madame Norman. Under the terrors of her rigid authority Benedetta consented to reject her innocent child from her bosom; and in conformity with my previous pledges, and during the insensibility of your mother, I bore you away; establishing my beloved son,—a second Ishmael,—under the governance of a more jealous Sarah.

"Compelled to hourly deception,—constant anxieties,—to the suppression of every tender impulse, -every parental emotion, -how often, dear Walter-my babe, my boy, my own, my only son,—have I wept in secret over your cradle; endeavouring to trace in your infant features some resemblance to her who was

lost to me for ever.

"From that period, from time to time, a letter was shown to me by Ghits containing the stern inquiry, 'Doth the child yet live?' - and 'The child liveth,' was the only reply which Stella chose that her sister should receive. I was never again permitted to behold her face. She was hurried from Paris. The Hôtel de L—— was sold. The second downfall of Napoleon precipitated the count anew from his high estate. But on this occasion, he experienced some alleviation. The newspapers apprized me, that, 'to his estates in Provence, the Comte de L-was accompanied by his devoted wife.'

"The sequel, my son, you have learned from others; -my prolonged sojourn on the continent; -my return to Selwood; the birth of the daughter who came to share without diminishing your father's affection;—the perfect fruition, in short, of

my culpable plan.
"The fate in store for us, Walter, I have not courage to conjecture. The Abbé O'Donnel,—who, apprized by the spies he had set over my conduct at St. Sylvain, of all that had occurred, was reduced to silence only by my threat of withdrawing my support from the Catholic cause in the event of his exposing the secret of your birth,—addresses me occasionally from Paris; prophesying a thousand evils from my persistence in my act of fraud. But I have promised, and will not recede. All to which I ever pledged myself in order to secure your rights, shall be rigidly performed; and should my utmost precautions fail,should the truth ultimately come to light, and this letter reach your hands,—then. Walter,—then, my beloved boy, pardon and pity your father.

Should your unhappy mother yet survive, disturb not by importunity the quiet of her latter days. It is for her to decide in what degree she chooses to admit your claims upon her tenderness. The enclosed letter secures you access to her presence. But I charge you, Walter, from the solemn refuge of the grave, recall not the sorrows of her youth by one single anxious hour. To Lady Norman you owe the gratitude,—to her, the submission of a son. Discharge both duties, I implore you, as some redemption of the errors of your affectionate and guilty father."

CHAPTER XLI.

Out, out, affection!
All bond and privilege of nature break,—
Let it be virtuous to be obstinate.

Shakspeare.

Such was the letter which sounded the troubled depths of Walter Norman's heart. One or two imperious missives from Madame Norman to Sir Richard, and a single enclosure addressed in his father's handwriting to the Comtesse de L—, completed the packet. Uncertain, at first, whether, after so considerable a lapse of years, the object of his solicitude still survived, on his arrival in Paris, he discovered, in the cemetery of Père La Chaise, a cenotaph in honour of her husband; promoted in his old age by the events of the revolution of 1830, to the rank of a field-marshal of France. The inscription on this pompous marble purported that it had been erected to his memory by "his afflicted widow;" and the intelligence thus conveyed of her survival, was in some degree consolatory. But the terms of the inscription offended the integrity of Walter. He felt that his mother had no right to define herself the "afflicted vidow" of the Comte de L——.

The difficulty experienced in obtaining information on the continent concerning even the most eminent private families, is scarcely to be credited by those accustomed to the condensed and incorporated frame of English society; which, by means of the press, maintains constant intercommunication. In France, the public is indifferent to the private proceedings of all but its political notabilities. Society is subdivided into myriads of circles, lacking a common centre; and Walter had to repeat his inquiries, till he trembled at the sound of the name of the Comtesse de I.—. After all, his discoveries amounted to nothing. The countess might still exist, but she was forgotten. She did not appear at court, and possessed no hôtel at Paris. Madame de I.— was probably to be heard of at Aix, at the Château des Mesnils, in the neighbourhood of which city her husband had expired.

Thither, therefore, did the anxious traveller direct his steps; and with what emotion, when he reflected that, two years

before, he had spent several days in the old Provençal capital,

little conjecturing his peculiar interest in the spot.

At Aix, his hopes were realized. Intelligence poured in upon him. The memory of the deceased field-marshal was held sacred in the province where, as a simple peasant, he had joined the army of the convention; and though the military renown which now under the reign of Louis Philippe rendered him a hero, had nearly subjected him to capitation under that of Louis XVIII., a pedestal was in progress, opposite the windows of the inn where Walter took up his quarters, destined to support the bust of field-marshal the Comte de L-

"His widow, one of the most beautiful women of Napoleon's court, resides upon her estate of Les Mesnils, five leagues off, added the master of the inn, in reply to Walter's interrogations. "But she is no longer worth looking at. Many years ago, the countess changed horses here on her way to the springs of the Mont d'Or; and I never saw a more withered, wasted creature. Since the death of the marshal, she has lived in retirement and

receives no one.

"No one but her family, I presume?" added Walter. "Family? Madame la Comtesse is a foreigner, an Italian. I never heard of her having a family, nor Monsieur le Maréchal either. His uncles and cousins were doubtless to be found in the streets of Lyons and Paris. But such a man wants no rela-

tions. His parents are his knapsack and sword."

On the following day, in pursuance of the information thus afforded, Walter betook himself to Les Mesnils; a compact antiquated little town, washed by the sparkling waters of the river Arc, and still retaining its ancient character of feudal dependence on the adjoining château. A tortuous street, scarcely wide enough to afford more than a footway, formed the only communication between the diminutive Place d'Armes, serving as a market-place, and a close containing the collegial church of St. Exupere, spacious and rich enough to adorn a considerable city. Facing the church, divided only by a courtyard bounded by a curious low stone wall or balustrade, stood the château; a vast edifice of dingy brick, ornamented with heavy carvings in stone; surmounted by high peaked roofs and towering chimneys, according to the favourite architecture of the times of Henri IV.

Hither, resolved to reconnoitre the territory and make further inquiries ere he hazarded an intrusion into the countess's presence, Walter hastened, the moment of his arrival. Though the struggle of contending emotions almost incapacitated him for the task of observation, he was struck by the solemn and cheerless aspect of the place. The vast solitary court-yard, the prodigious range of windows devoid of all vestige of human habitation,—the wilderness of chimneys, from not one of which smoke was issuing, -imparted to the Château des Mesnils the aspect of a religious house, or rather, of an uninhabited

"If you are looking for the entrance to the gardens, my gentleman," said a crippled beggar, who hobbled after him from the church steps in hopes of a gratuity, "you must go round to the state court behind the old college. But the gardens are not open to-day. Madame la Comtesse allows them to be visited by strangers only three days in the week. Charité, mon beau m'sieur,—un petit sou pour l'amour de Dieu!

Scarcely understanding the words addressed to him, Walter proceeded in the direction pointed out. But on reaching the spot, a grey-headed porter made his appearance from a lodge adjoining the gates, to announce that the gardens were closed to the public. The offer of a gratuity with a view of bribing

admittance, seemed to offend the old man's dignity. "The gardens of Les Mesnils were not shown for money. If monsieur chose to return at noon on the following day, he would be

admitted."

Still Walter lingered near the gate; apparently in admiration of the rich parterres of carnations, dahlias, and other autumnal flowers which covered the vast platform before the southern façade of the house, and formed the prelude to its farfamed English gardens. But his eyes were, in truth, directed towards a company of five or six priests, who were sauntering through the gardens, as if in possession of the place; reminding Walter of the hint he had already received at the inn, that the Jesuits exercised unlimited influence at the château. He had been assured, moreover, by the same authority, that the countess entertained a strong prejudice against the English: perhaps, because they were heretics; perhaps, because of the animosities cherished against them by *Monsieur le Maréchal*; but certain it was that no English family applying to view the château on unprivileged days had ever obtained permission.

Deterred by this assurance from hazarding an application. Walter postponed till the following morning a visit which he trusted would afford facilities for nearer approach to the recluse. In the course of the day, however, he ascertained in desultory conversation from a respectable tradesman of the town, that the widowed countess, reduced by ill health to premature old age, was the slave of the pères de la congrégation, attached to the college; and that from the moment of the marshal's decease, she had remained immured in her own apartments.

"I have sometimes caught a glimpse of Madame la Comtesse, sauntering on the terrace with which her rooms are connected," said the man; " and though she is little more than forty years of age, you would take her for sixty; her countenance is so severe, and her face so pallid. But I am wrong to apply a disparaging word to her! Madame is careful to maintain, as in the mar-

shal's lifetime, all the noble charitable establishments of Les Mesnils. And I have a notion she would live on a more sociable and Christian footing with her neighbours, were it not for the priests. It is supposed that they want her to re-endow the college. She has already given a hundred thousand francs of the old marshal's fortune (beyond the sum bequeathed by his will), for the reparation of the collegiate church. So much the better. The church is an honour to Les Mesnils. Still, it would be a happier thing for Madame la Comtesse, if the superior and his black brethren did not cage her up among them; terrifying her latter days, and perplexing her household with their

"Austere devotion!" "Prolonged ill-health!" Such, then, was the fate of his ill-starred mother. On the morrow, the intelligence Walter had received was confirmed. A long and leisurely promenade in the gardens enabled him to win so far upon the confidence of the venerable porter, that the old man admitted, without much pressing, the total subjection of his

lady to her spiritual pastors.

"Formerly," said he, "Madame la Comtesse was kind and indulgent. Thirty years have I been porter here. I was placed here, indeed, by the agents of Monsieur le Général, on the very day the estates of Les Mesnils were bestowed on him by the emperor, as a reward for his good service at Austerlitz. He was a bachelor then; and it was long enough before the events of the war allowed him to come and take a peep at the château. I had been five years in his service before I saw his face."

"You had no great loss, I fancy," observed Walter, inconsiderately. "I have heard him described as a good soldier, but

a harsh, violent, unfeeling man."

"Under your pardon, they lied who told you so!" cried the old porter, his withered cheek reddening with indignation. "Never was there a kinder master, a better man. He had not so many finiking phrases and congees, maybe, as the fribbles of the old régime who were brought back to us, sir, by the red-coats, your countrymen. But a right good heart,—a right Christian heart! God be with his soul!"

"I was probably misinformed," replied Walter, in a deprecating tone. "But you were speaking, my good friend, of the

countess?"

"I was saying, sir, that when, twenty years ago, or thereabouts, she first visited the château, young and beautiful as she then was (a pearl, sir, of a woman!), we servants fancied that it was for a month's whimsey,—here and away again;—that she would soon weary of the old woods and turrets of Les Mesnils, and be off to Paris. But no such thing! From that day to this she has never quitted the place, except once, when the general was ordered to try the Vichy waters, and she made it a duty to bear him company." "Commanding the most distinguished society of the neigh-

bourhood," observed Walter, "the countess probably-

"Society?" interrupted the porter. "In the marshal's time, it is true, she was obliged sometimes to receive Monsieur le Préfet, the commandant of Aix, and others of the authorities, who came to visit him. But since his death, not a visitor has broke bread in the château, save their reverences of the Congrégation; and even with them, madame is never well enough to sit at table."

"Is her health, then, so much enfeebled?"

"It is nearly a year since I was in my lady's presence, sir. But as far as my old eyes can judge, she steps out firmly enough when I watch her pacing the terrace of her apartments yonder,

early of mornings, or late at evenings.'

"I own I am curious to obtain a sight of one whose beauty has been so celebrated," observed Norman, trying to speak unconcernedly. "Could you not admit me into the gardens or the lodge, at an hour when I am likely to obtain a glimpse of her?"

"On public days, the gardens are open from daybreak till nightfall," said the old man. "Earlier in the season, when visitors are abundant, Madame la Comtesse never quits her room on those days. But you are the first stranger we have seen here these three weeks; so that, of late, madame has been daily on the terrace."

At the old man's suggestion, therefore, and under a promise of discretion, Walter returned to the château towards sunset. The porter was already stationed before the great gates, on the

look-out for him.

"I was afraid you would not come," said he; "and I did not dare go to the inn to fetch you. Old Joseph's livery-coat is so rarely seen in the streets of Les Mesnils, that it sets people's tongues wagging whenever I do make my appearance. But what is the matter?" he continued, noting with consternation the sudden change that overspread Walter's countenance, when, from the window of the lodge, he discerned upon the terrace above, on which the setting sun was shedding its lustre, the tall, alender figure of a woman attired in mourning; escorted by an ecclesiastic with whom she was engaged in discourse. Walter was, in truth, scarcely able to support the conflict of his feelings; for in that woman he beheld his mother; in that priest, the lawgiver by whose austerity her hours were embittered.

Vanly did he attempt to discriminate through the distance, the features of her face. His eyes were dim with tears. He could trace nothing but two shadowy forms slowly passing

through the evening air.

He was recalled to his presence of mind by the voice of the eld man; who, beginning to fear from the irritability with which his guest motioned away the offer of a glass of water, that

he took some deeper interest in the scene than was altogether warrantable, now presented him the book in which it was usual for visitors to inscribe their names.

"I omitted this morning, sir, to request your compliance with the custom of the place," said Monsieur Joseph, consequentially

tendering him a pen.

"Does Madame la Comtesse ever inspect the book?" cried

Walter, in a tremulous voice.

Occasionally; rarely, however, till the close of the season." "Listen," resumed Walter, insinuating into his hand a sum of gold pieces doubling the amount it had ever been the fortune of that withered palm to enclose. "Contrive that madame shall see the signature I am about to inscribe before she sleeps, and the same sum I now offer you awaits you to-morrow. Do not hesitate. You will confer as great a service on your lady as on myself, by acceding to my request."

The name of "Walter Norman of Selwood" was accordingly legibly traced upon a page seldom inscribed with those of his countrymen; and after some further discussion, old Joseph undertook that the countess's waiting-woman, who was a niece of his own, should present the book that night for her

inspection.

On the following day, Walter hastened at an early hour to the lodge, to learn the result of this attempt.

You have brought sad ill-luck to me, sir," replied the old man, in a melancholy tone, after pocketing the remainder of his reward. Monsieur le Supérieur visited me in person this morning, before my latch was up, with orders from the countess that the gardens should never again be opened to visitors.

And the old man proceeded to enumerate the beauties of the shrubberies of which he had been so long the cicerone, and the names of the illustrious visitors to whom he had enjoyed the satisfaction of displaying them, as if in attestation of the injury

inflicted on him.

And the book?" impatiently interrupted Walter.

"Ay, ay! The book, sacredi! as if we had not heard enough of the book, the origin of all the mischief! The book, sir, is henceforward to be deposited at the château."

"You are certain, however, that it was submitted to the

countess?"

"Certain as of the deluge. Mademoiselle Antonine came down to the lodge last night, after dark, to cross-question me about my motives for having it shown to her lady. The countess, it seems, was furious on reading the name you had written; and instantly sent off one of the footmen to the college, in search of Monsieur le Supérieur, who was closeted with her till nearly midnight.

"Furious! Her only sentiment, then, on reading my name, was anger!" murmured Walter, as he retraced his steps to the inn. "Such are the impulses of her heart, when the chord is touched to which its fondest affections ought to vibrate! This woman must be more firmly, more sternly dealt with."

And without a moment's hesitation, he despatched, in his own name, a letter to the château, requesting, in strong but respectful terms, an immediate interview with Madame la Comtesse de L——.

A verbal answer was as speedily returned. "Madame la Comtesse de L—— was too infirm in health to receive visitors; and regretted being unable to make any exception to her rule." Snatching up his hat, he proceeded straight to the château; and accosting one of the domestics lounging in the vestibule, desired him to acquaint his lady that an English gentleman, having family letters of consequence to deliver to the hand of the countess, demanded immediate admittance to her presence.

But this expedient procured only a reiteration of the former answer:—"The countess would receive no visits. Any letter with which the English gentleman was charged must be delivered

to the superior."

"Is he in the house?" cried Walter, every stronger emotion

giving way to resentful feelings.

"It is not yet the hour for the supérieur's daily visit to the château," replied the servant. "If Monsieur chooses to return in a couple of hours, he will be sure of meeting him."

Already Walter had determined otherwise. Proceeding straight to the dilapidated gates of the college, he demanded admittance to one whose sacred functions rendered it impos-

sible to issue orders of exclusion.

There is something in the tranquil atmosphere of a religious house peculiarly soothing to those who pass the threshold in a spirit of piety and peace; but to persons predisposed to attribute hypocrisy and evil dealing to its immates, neaseous and irritating. Ushered by a demure acolyte along a mildewed corridor towards the dismantled study of his superior, Walter fancied that the denuded condition of the place bore attestation of the interested views of those whom already he regarded as his adversaries. Nor did the inauspicious countenance of Father Cyrillus, the superior of the establishment, serve to disarm his prejudices.

"I present myself to you, Reverend Father," said the impetuous young man, not waiting for the lofty interrogatory with which he saw that the priest was preparing to address him, "to demand, through your assistance, access to a lady

under your spiritual governance."

"You are, I conclude, the English traveller to whom Madame la Comtesse de L— has this morning denied admittance?" replied the superior, slightly pointing to a seat, but making no attempt to rise from his own.

"Admittance was denied me in her name," persisted Walter.

"But my claims upon the countess are of such a nature that it is not in the heart of woman to have issued the mandate I received."

"Madame la Comtesse is mistress of her actions," replied the superior with hauteur. "Those of your nation, sir, have at all times been unwelcome guests at Les Mesnils. Wherefore, it is

not for me to determine."

"You are the countess's confessor, her director!" cried Walter, glancing round as if to ascertain that no eavesdroppers were at hand. "In that sacred capacity, you have become aware of the motives of this antipathy. Know, therefore, that the lover whom Madame la Comtesse may have made it her duty to avoid, has long been numbered with the dead. I, Reverend Father,

am his son."

"The name you last night despatched as your introduction to her presence informed me as much," replied the superior, without displacing a muscle of his sallow countenance. "It is on that account you are more pointedly excluded than others. For two years past it has been my task to watch over the spiritual condition of the countess; and I have made it my duty, young sir, to prepare the mind of my penitent for such an attempt as you are now meditating. You do not take us by surprise. I charge you, therefore, out of respect to my sacred calling, and to the instincts of nature, refrain from molesting one who has long risen superior to the fatal temptation of worldly affections."

"The temptation of a mother's love!" scornfully reiterated Walter. "Happy the mortal whose temptations are, of no severer nature! But you mistake me and my purposes. You conclude me to be a needy adventurer, having views upon the Countess's fortune; a heretic, disposed to withdraw her benefits from the Catholic Church and its dependencies. Reassure yourself! I refer you, Reverend Sir, to your principal at Rome, for attestation of the personal distinctions conferred upon me by the Sovereign Pontiff. Through life, my social position has been equal to that of the Comtesse de L—; and at this moment I am heir to one of the richest commoners and most influential senators of Great Britain."

The demeanour of the Reverend Father became suddenly softened by this opportune announcement, the utmost importance being attached by foreigners, even by reigning sovereigns,

to a British member of Parliament.

"I should esteem myself unfortunate, my son, if anything in my words or deportment induced you to attribute to unwarrantable influence the resolution taken by the countess. But you appear to attach strange importance to this interview?"

"Does it need explanation that a son should desire to throw

himself at the feet of his only surviving parent?"

"In that case, you are somewhat tardy in admitting the

impulse. More than twenty years has the countess abided unmolested under yonder roof."____

"A few months ago," replied Walter, "I was ignorant of her very existence. But from the hour the fatal secret of my birth was disclosed to me, I have existed only in the hope of looking upon my mother's face. Let her deny me, and I will not answer for the rash extremities to which I may be driven."

"And the secret was disclosed at length?" demanded the

priest, without even noticing his menace.

"By a letter bequeathed by my father. A packet superscribed by Sir Richard Norman's hand, must be delivered to the countess by my own. Be present, if you choose, at our interview. But as God hears and judges me, ere the sun sets, I will reach the presence of my mother!"

"To remonstrate with the gracelessness of one so reckless would, I perceive, be of small avail," observed the priest, rising and taking his hat from the wall. "Follow me, young sir. To avoid the perpetration of an outrage, you shall see the Comtesse de L.—. But you will not gather from her lips sentiments more auspicious than you have received from mine.

Ten minutes afterwards, Walter, after being ushered by Father Cyrillus up the vast gloomy painted staircase of the château, along a suite of antiquated rooms hung with old-fashioned tapestry, was requested to wait in a small and more com-modiously-furnished chamber, opening to the terrace already described, while the superior proceeded to represent to the countess his peremptory pretensions.

CHAPTER XLII.

A heart generous and noble,—noble in its scorn Of all things low and little;—nothing there Sordid or servile!

Rooms.

VAIN were it to describe Walter Norman's state of mind as he stood watching the door through which he trusted that the countess would make her appearance. The chair on which he leaned for support seemed about to give way under his convulsive grasp. Yet notwithstanding these demonstrations, his emotions were of no tender nature. Stung to the quick by the conduct of the countess, he had so far resumed the mastery over himself as to resolve that no womanish tear should shame his cheeks, no fond epithet escape his lips. He would stand before the woman who had rejected the yearnings of his filial love, as a judge—then, having delivered the letter of Sir Richard Norman to her hands, depart for ever from her sight.

The door slowly unclosed, and Walter's heart beat with insupportable violence. But his brow remained calm; and he stirred not a step towards the lady who advanced into the chamber, led to a seat in the position furthest from the light, by the hand which she seemed to have selected for the absolute control of her movements. Eagerly as her son had longed to look upon her face, he dared not as yet raise his eyes directly towards her. While obeying the dictates of courtesy by a formal obeisance, he indistinctly beheld a face, pale even to ghastliness, and cold even to severity; and trembled to hear the sound of voice accompanying this austere countenance. She spoke, however, and his alarm subsided!

"You have business with me, I understand," said the countess, in a firm, but not ungentle voice. "I pray you let it be as briefly as possible despatched; I am a weak and infirm woman, anxious only to descend into the grave without disturbance of that blessed peace with which the mercy of heaven and the counsels of pious friends have comforted my latter days."

"God forbid, Madam, that I should be the means of ruffling your tranquillity!" replied Walter, with stern contempt; "and God keep me from desiring such selfish serenity as can be obtained at the expense of all sensibility to the welfare of others. Trust me, I will hazard no word, no look of appeal, likely to endanger your tranquillity. But had I dreamed of finding you thus completely self-absorbed, I would have spared

myself a weary pilgrimage, undertaken in the hope of exciting momentary sympathy in the heart wherein my own life's blood is flowing. I would have spared myself the journey. I would have denied myself the fond presentiments by which it was solaced. Yet, if I obtain nothing further by my intrusion into your presence, I obtain a lesson, a harsh one, a cruel one, but valuable as tearing away the last illusion dear to my heart."

Walter had not intended to speak thus. But the words burst in spontaneous vehemence from his lips; and, as he raised his eyes towards the countess, at the close of his address, he fancied he could discern a glance of deprecation directed by his unhappy mother towards the superior, as if imploring his sanction to her relenting. No sign, however, escaped the priest; nor any token of tenderness the penitent over whom he exercised his iron sway.

"I have had the honour of acquainting Madame la Comtesse," observed Father Cyrillus to the stranger, "that your errand at Les Mesnils is simply to deliver a letter, of which you are the

depositary."

"It is true that I came hither with the purpose of placing such a deposit in her hands," replied Walter. "But reflection convinces me that the letter in question was addressed by my father to a heart warm with the best instincts of womanly tenderness; and that he would not have desired to waste his confidence upon a soul hardened by the harshness of a task-master."

The superior, darting a fiery glance towards Walter, was about to utter an angry rejoinder. But the countess indicated by a sign her desire that the young man should be suffered to

proceed.

"I am aware, Madam," he accordingly resumed, "that my father has made a fruitless effort in my favour. At the hour when, summoned to the presence of his Maker, the consciousness of his guilt and its results weighed heavily on his soul, Sir Richard Norman anticipated the destiny eventually to fall upon his son. He saw that the time would come, when, cut off from all social ties, the wretch born to no community of kindred—the predestined alien, orphan, castaway, would hunger and thirst after the impulses of natural affection, and hunger and thirst in vain! He foresaw me exposed to the scorn of society; and feeling that all this and more, were amply redeemed by the precious ransom of a mother's love, he hazarded, in my behalf, some allusion to the hopes and promises of those happier days, when, for his child, the father had a right to anticipate a renewal of the affection once lavished upon himself."

As Walter gave utterance to these heartfelt words, gradually laying aside all reserve, he burst into the fervent eloquence of passion; while the countess, as by degrees she raised her eyes

towards him, seemed fascinated and spell-bound by the tone and deportment so vividly recalling to her mind the lover of her youth. At length, as he traced the touching picture of his own isolation, she clasped her hands together in anguish, and but for the restraining presence of her director, would probably have risen and thrown herself upon the neck of her son. The stern glance of the superior served, however, to restore her to

submission.

"Fear nothing!" resumed Walter, noticing with contempt a varying expression of her countenance. "I will not prethe varying expression of her countenance. sume upon my father's tenderness to enforce my claims upon yours. This shall be the last time, Madam, of my intruding into your presence. We have met. I have looked upon the face which, waking or sleeping, in my dreams, in my prayers, in solitude, in society, has, for months past, been the object of my solicitudes. I have heard your voice. My own eyes have witnessed your alienation. Nature has pleaded nothing in my favour. I stand before you as the child of a stranger; and, since such your heart and sentiments, I will depart in silence, and in silence preserve the memory of your insensibility. I will not complain; I will not murmur. My fate will be only a degree more hard-more bitter. But in compensation, Madam, I will retain my father's letter, as a token that he, at least, was not callous to the degradation of the humiliated being his errors had called into existence.

"Give me the letter!" cried the countess, twice clearing her voice to speak, ere she could utter an intelligible sound.

Valter hesitated.

"I have a claim upon your obedience," persisted Madame

When at length, after a moment's hesitation, Walter, taking it from his bosom placed it on the table beside her, his hands trembled on finding himself so near his unnatural mother, that their dresses rustled against each other. Indescribably agitated, he stopped short as he was about to recede from the table, and fixed his eyes upon her face, as if his whole soul were concentrated in search of respondent sensibility. Overpowered by this clinging, searching gaze, her bosom heaved with the oppression of her embarrassed respiration. She raised her eyes wistfully towards Walter, as if imploring forbearance; but, on beholding in his the rolling tears which a strong effort alone enabled him to retain unshed, a hectic flush traversed her pallid cheeks, and her lips became tremulous with emotion. In another moment, Walter was at her feet, his face concealed in the folds of her dress, and thick coming sobs bursting with frantic violence from his bosom!

Father Cyrillus hastened to disengage the countess from the

embraces of her son.

"Leave us," said she, faintly motioning to the superior to

desist. "Leave us together. You have nothing to apprehend from my weakness. You perceive that I am mistress of myself. But before I lose sight of him for ever, a few words of explanation must enable him to form a fairer interpretation of his mother."

Without a pretext for refusal, the superior, concealing his vexation under an obeisance of hypocritical humility, retired from the room; and, ere Walter had risen from his knees, the countess's arms were flung around him, while a mother's first and only his synapsy forwardly imprinted upon his forehead.

and only kiss was fervently imprinted upon his forehead.

"It needed no letter to announce you to me!" she murmured, after slowly and tenderly perusing his features. "You are his image—his living image. In you, Sir Richard Norman stands before me. You love him—you venerate his memory. You weigh his fault as light in comparison with mine. You estimate his parental affection as warm in comparison with mine. But ere we part, learn at least to appreciate the motives of my conduct. Your father, you say, revealed to you the mystery of your birth—that is, he related the fall of an inexperienced, uncounselled woman, and the fraud to which the impetuosity of my poor sister compelled my assent. Your own experience further reminds you that, for twenty years, your mother has survived that fall, that fraud, yet deigned to take no cognizance of your existence. Listen, Walter, to my exculpation!

"The late Comte de I.— was, doubtless, described by your father (for thus was he described to him by myself), as coarse, brutal, jealous, cruel, a man unworthy of, and incapable of preserving the affections of his wife. At the period of my marriage I was fifteen. A thoughtless girl, recently emancipated from the nursery, such was the opinion I formed of a man thirty years older than myself; uncouth in person, uncultivated in mind, with all the roughness of the camp about him, enforcing every sentence with an oath, commencing his day's pleasures with a dram, and crowning them with a pipe! I loathed him—literally loathed him; for at that unpractised age such trivialities exercise a serious influence on the affections. I saw nothing in my husband beyond his superficial blemishes. From the period of my ill-starred marriage, however, to that of my acquaintance with your father, I was not many weeks molested with his society. You know the rest. Young, unadvised, and self-reliant, I formed an attachment which soon terminated in guilt and misery.

which soon terminated in guilt and misery.

"I will not describe, Walter, the anguish, the terrors, the struggles, the remorse, which agitated my distracted mind previous to your birth; for these, a feeling heart will readily conceive. All I have now to unfold regards the incidents of

my subsequent existence.

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"Three months after your birth, I was brought, by my sister

here to this very château, and placed, according to her promise, under the protection of my husband. My heart sank within me as I entered the gates. But I was not wholly without con-I trusted I was come to die. Humiliated, heartsolation. broken, I looked forward only to the repose of the grave. Judge, however, what were the emotions of my soul on entering for the first time, after all that had occurred, the dreaded presence of the Comte de L

" 'This is indeed kind and considerate of you, to visit the old soldier in his exile!' oried he, after imprinting a rough kiss on my cheek in presence of the servants, and holding me at arm's length, as if to examine the changes effected in my person by the lapse of the last three years. 'Handsomer,-a thousand times handsomer than when I left you for Burgos! Ah! Madame la Comtesse, it will be a cruel trial for you to bury all these roses and lilies among the forests of Provence!

"'My sister, sir, is ambitious only of sharing your retirement,' interrupted Stella. 'With your permission, she will abide with you at Les Mesnils without dreaming of further change.

"The general surveyed me with a scrutinizing, but not

unkindly eye.

"' 'Is it so?' was his abrupt inquiry.

"'I earnestly hope to remain here till the end of my days!" said I. It was needless to add that I believed them to be

already numbered.

"'Then it shall not be my fault if a single one of them be darkened by a care, oried the count. 'I'm not a bad fellow at heart, Madame la Comtesse. Hitherto you and I have misunderstood each other. But sounder heads than mine are sometimes mended,—instead of being broken,—by a downfall. I have learned to look philosophically on the chances of life and would fain teach you the same lesson. We have both had our trials,—we have still our cares. But courage, my dear child! Time brings all things round. The emperor gave you a husband,—I offer you a father!'

"'I accept the offer with respect and gratitude,' said I,

seizing the rough hand abruptly extended towards me.
"'Then there is no reason that quiet days may not be yet in store for us!' said he, glancing towards my sister, a delighted witness of the turn this dreaded interview was taking. Choose chateau is large enough for both of us, without jostling. your own suite of apartments, my dear little wife, and have them arranged according to your fancy. No one, not even myself, shall ever intrude upon you without leave. And now. are you content with the regulations of the garrison of Les Mesnils?'

"From that hour, Walter, the conventions self-imposed by the general were strictly fulfilled. My sister departed for Trieste at the close of the winter, leaving her poor Benedetta in some measure reconciled to her lot. The general never invaded my solitude without previously asking permission to become my visitor; his deportment being at all times, in accordance with his promise, that of an indulgent father soothing the melancholy

of a wayward child.

"But this was not all. The intimacy of domestic life under the same roof gradually developed to me the character of the man to whom I was united. Hitherto, I had known him only as the bravest of men, at an epoch when all men were brave. I now learned to what a pitch of love and veneration he had contrived to attach the hearts of his men. On his dismissal from the army, the dissatisfaction of the troops was expressed even to mutiny. He had been an idol among them; openhanded, open-hearted, sharing their privations as well as their perils; comforting the hospital, and cheering the infirmary, as well as inspiriting the field of battle. Beloved by the aged as a son,—by the active as a brother,—by the young conscripts as

father,—the separation was a cruel trial to them all.

"In the privacy of civil life, the virtues of the old soldier did but experience further development. Devoid of immediate kindred, he had raised the few distant relations remaining to him to comfort and independence. During his last campaigns, the general had despatched home to Les Mesnils a host of his disabled veterans, besides settling on his estates the widows and orphans of many of the brave fellows who had fallen at his side; and on our installation at the château, it was his care to provide fitting asylums for the reception of these protegés, carefully avoiding the aspect and discipline of the almshouse. Cheerful cottages, each with its little garden, were awarded to those who were able to dispense with attendance; while an airy infirmary. constructed in a wing of the château, awaited the more ailing. Never shall I forget the look of fatherly affection with which the general regarded me, when, on the installation of our pensioners, I flew from chamber to chamber, almost gay, almost happy, while contemplating the results of his beneficence.

"Encouraged by his approval, I devoted myself with ardour to my new duties. I allowed myself no leisure for retrospection. I lived in the present. I dedicated my whole strength, my whole faculties, to the solace of others. My husband's precept that it was never too late to be virtuous, seemed to breathe new life into my exertions. Thus occupied, the humility with which I had learned to reverence my husband deepened into affection. While he watched over and encouraged me as a father, I loved him like a child. Any other sentiment would have been profanation to his grey hairs. I was a dishonoured woman: he all that was good and true. From the moment he learned to estimate in its true light the incongruity of our union, and to condemn his own weakness in having sanctioned the misjudging

project of the emperor, he had ceased to regard me as his wife. I was now his pupil,—his daughter,—his heir;—and he the

object of my veneration.

Thus, Walter, passed my tranquil years; in the discharge of active duties, in the enjoyment of gratitude and peace; and my youth fled by unheeded. Wherever I went, I heard blessings lavished upon the name of my husband; and many a death-bed have I knelt beside, where the last breath of the dying recommended to God the happiness of the most princely of benefactors. What was to me now my husband's want of scholarship, or want of polish? Had he not fulfilled the noblest purposes of existence, by devoting to his country the strength and vigour of his manhood, and to the benefit of his fellow creatures the opulence by which the sacrifice had been repaid?

creatures the opulence by which the sacrifice had been repaid?

"Was it for his wife, Walter, to dishonour the roof of that venerable man, by dwelling upon memories of guilty love? Had I hazarded the disturbance of his tranquillity by instituting inquiries into your welfare, I might have broken the heart of one whose life was a source of blessings to thousands. I held my peace, therefore. I subdued the instincts of nature. I was thus offering to my husband the only sacrifice of atonement in my power. I noted not the lapse of time. Absorbed in complicated household duties, youth and beauty departed

not only unregretted, but unnoticed.

"At the close of eighteen years, old age had laid its hand gently, but firmly, on the venerable head of my husband. The step, long faltering, ceased at last to bear him his round of visits of consolation. The white hair waxed thinner upon his fallen temples. The soldier's rough voice and impatient caths had given place to words of peace and resignation. Then, Walter, then was it the comfort of his wife to kneel beside the chair of the decaying veteran;—to satisfy him with tidings of his sick—of his poor,—and solace him with promises that, when he was gone, I would be unto them all that he had ever been! Expressions of sympathy in his own sufferings he would never receive. 'I am happy,' was his reply, 'I am well; for feebleness is the health of old age. Next to death upon the field of battle, calm extinction, amid loving and regretful hearts, is the noblest lot vouchsafed to sinful man. And you will regret me, my sweet wife. You will lament the veteran whose esteem has been the support of your well-doing. The respect earned from the depths of my soul by the perfectness of your love, will be your passport to eternal mercy."

"'Stop!' cried I, driven one day almost to frenzy by a panegyric which conveyed such bitter reproaches to my conscience. 'You deceive yourself, I myself have deceived you. I

am not worthy your esteem—I am not-

'Hush!' said he, laying his wasted hand upon my lips, with a beneficent smile, 'I know all. From the first, I have known

I have never been deceived. Your father watched over your repentance, till your husband was able to bestow perfect forgiveness upon his wife. As a recompense for all I have borne, bear with me, dearest, till the end. Then, give a few tears to the old man's memory, and the remnant of your days to

happiness!

Yes, Walter,—from the first he had known all. But on examining my fault with conscientious scrutiny, pity mingled with his blame; pity for the young girl flung into his arms, whom he had despised and avoided for her levity, instead of aiding her with the counsels or restraining her by the authority of a husband. Self-convicted, he forgave; as those who trespass are enjoined to pardon, lest their trespasses call down the vengeance of the Most High!

"Elevated at the eleventh hour to new distinctions by the Revolution which gave liberal governors to France, the veteran did not long survive his promotion to the rank of Field Marshal. It was a dreary hour for your mother that followed the loss of that best of friends. When the passing bell announced his departure, the poor wept their benefactor. I, alone, was denied

the solace of tears.

"Providence, however, still prospered me by its mercies. brotherhood of venerable men drawn by the events of the Revolution from their establishment in the capital, took refuge at Les Mesnils. The dilapidated walls of the old college annexed to the château, which, till the completion of our infirmary, had received our sick, were not yet levelled with the ground, and afforded an asylum to the fugitives. Deprived by the decree of government of their office as the instructors of youth, these pious men did not disdain to assuage the terrors of a penitent soul in its time of trouble: and the words of grace have maintained, and will, I trust, maintain my courage during the brief remnant of my days. Long concealment of an ever-gnawing care has forestalled for me the epoch of old age: my decaying health promises me a speedy release from bondage.

"In this habitation, where every object, recalling the memory of my better days, invites me to rejoin my husband in the grave, I should have held it an act of treachery had I attempted the renewal of a tie which, during the life of my benefactor, duty compelled me to disavow. When your writing, Walter, was laid before me, the struggle was great. But to surmount the temptation thus afforded, was a sacrifice to be tendered to the dead, in requital for years of generous for bearance. My judgment was confirmed by that of my spiritual adviser. Here, where the echoes of that honest voice still appear to linger, and where the last breath of that noble breast exhaled to heaven, I must not, I dare not—clasp to my bosom the son of Sir Richard Norman."

bosom the son of Sir Richard Norman.

As the countess ceased to speak. Walter raised his head

which had long been declined upon his breast; and his composed but pallid countenance attested the impression produced

on him by the narrative of his mother.

"Go to yonder church," she continued, pointing to the Gothic towers discernible through the lofty window. "You will find there a column dedicated to the memory of the dead by the simple earnings of the poor! The banners suspended above it, were taken by royal permission from the Invalides to which they had been consigned by the brayery of the Count de L.—. The inscription upon the grave below.

Dee, Regi, pauperibusque carissimus!

was placed there by a public decree. And shall I, in defiance of such trophies, such renown, such virtues, embrace before the face of the world a son born to have been my blessing, had not

his birth conveyed dishonour to my husband?"

Walter's reply, when he found courage to reply, was patient and moderate. He saw that it would require time to counteract the strong bias of his mother's opinions, and the influence of designing adversaries. But he had time,—he had his whole life before him—for the effort. He affected therefore, for the present, no opposition. He trusted to nature to plead for him, and he did not trust in vain.

Already, the countess's mind was relieved as from a heavy burthen, by her affecting explanations. By degrees, she permitted herself to hazard inquiries in return. The tale of Walter's sorrows was unfolded to her, with all the events of his till lately unclouded life. He spoke of Lady Norman,—of his sister,—of the friends created for him by the undesserved wretchedness of his situation;—and the countess's tears had been long falling ere she was aware of the transgression.

The hours went by unnoticed. Evening came; and Walter was still by his mother's side. The superior was summoned; and read in the countenances of both, his sentence of defeat. The young Englishman was already invited to return on the morrow, to inspect the numerous foundations and establishments annexed by its late owner to the château. On the morrow, he was invited to return the following day, for a last farewell. Before the close of the week, he had been folded again and again in the arms of a mother who, on the precept of her venerated husband that no situation is too fallen to be made the foundation of virtue, became persuaded that maternal love, so indulged as to afford no scandal to the living, no offence to the dead, was but the perfecting of her probation.

no offence to the dead, was but the perfecting of her probation. The inhabitants of Les Mesnils, saving the reverend members of the college, who, finding nothing to apprehend from Walter's rapacity, judged it wiser to withdraw their opposition, and preserve the secret, were misled by a similarity of name between

the young stranger and the countess's sister, into supposing him her nephew. Leaning upon his arm, their benefactress visited them as usual; often pausing to point out to her guest the wisdom and tenderness of the deceased maréchal's provisions for their comfort. They saw her gradually assume a more healthful and happier aspect; and though ignorant that the iron grasp of bigotry which had seized upon her soul in the weakness of her affliction, was gradually relaxing under a holier influence, uttered blessings upon the stranger, who seemed sent as a messenger of peace to one whose tears had not been wept in vain.

CHAPTER XLIII.

The darkest storm Raves but to lend enhancement to the calm, Whose holy hours succeed :- hours of sweet peace, With setting sunlight and soft summer airs Breathing celestial influence.

SOUTHEY.

TIDINGS of this happy change in his destinies were soon despatched by Walter to his English friends. Compelled to quit Provence to assume the duties of a diplomatic appointment obtained for him at the court of Naples, he readily pledged himself to return to Les Mesnils in the course of the following

"I live but till we meet again!" was the fond exclamation of the Italian mother, who, having once given free course to her affections, could only love with enthusiasm. "The trust bequeathed to me requires me to expend the remainder of my days at Les Mesnils. But my comfort will be in hearing of your well doing,—of your happiness,—and at rare intervals, looking upon your face. A more prolonged blessing would be greater than my deserts."

In fulfilment of his engagement, Walter revisited the château, last spring, on his way home to Fern Hill. His business in England was to bestow the hand of his lovely sister, after being a second time refused to the son of Lord Mornington, the new heir of Selwood, upon the favourite nephew and future successor of Sir Thomas Audley, and the bustling Lady Audley, gratified by the prospects of this family match of her own devising, is already plotting with Mrs. Avesford to fix her favourite Walter in England, by an equally auspicious alliance. For in spite of the loss of his honours, Walter, the living image of her first love, still remains her favourite. Her nephew, the

Spring-chicken, is as thoroughly in her ill graces as her haughty sister-in-law, Lady Mornington; and though Walter, true to his friendship for the cousin who was faithful to him in his misfortunes, eloquently pleads the cause of Captain Norman by setting forth a bad education as the source of his follies, the kith and kin, as well as the neighbours and tenants of the Selwood family, have never ceased to regret the banished

A new day, meanwhile, has dawned upon the precincts of Fern Hill. The eyes of the country are upon the spot,—the hopes of happy hearts,—the blessings of the poor. Hand in hand, Avesford and his pupil are pursuing the task of improvement. An official appointment of some moment is about to give ample scope to the development of Walter's talents, as well as to recall him to London, where Avesford's house is the chartered gathering-place of the friends of learning, science, and

humanity.

"If it were not for a sight of Matty's doleful countenance now and then, I swear I should forget that matters were ever otherwise among us than at present!" said Cruttenden Maule one day, in one of his flying visits to Woldham Rectory. "However, even her long face has grown shorter since she saw her girl so happily settled in life. The Farleigh dowager has been staying with her, at Halsewell, ever since Constance and her husband went to settle at Audley House; and they comfort each other, I suppose, by prosing over old times and railing at the world. Old Crutt. used to swear that, egg or bird, Matty would never lose her liking for lords and ladies. However, as she marred the happiness of her young days by marrying out of her sphere, 'tis fit she should fish what comfort she can out of the same troubled waters.'

Lady Norman is, however, looking forward to a better source of consolation. A second generation is about to arise in the promised offspring of the Audleys. Ere long, Matilda will be attracted by new ties to the neighbourhood of Fern Hill; and forget that to the fine young man who already commands there so large a share of popular favour, accusing reminiscences are attached, as having been imposed on the acceptance of the world as the supposititious Heir of Selwood.

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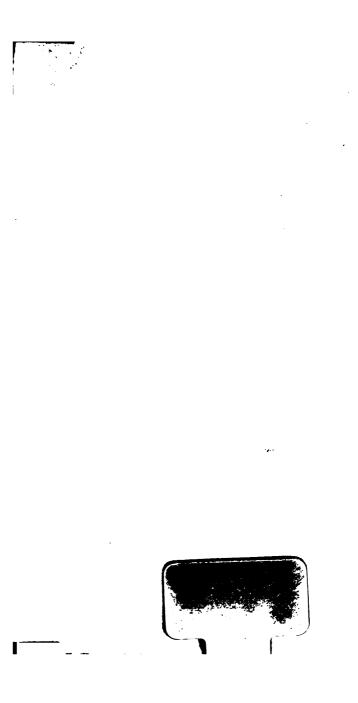
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